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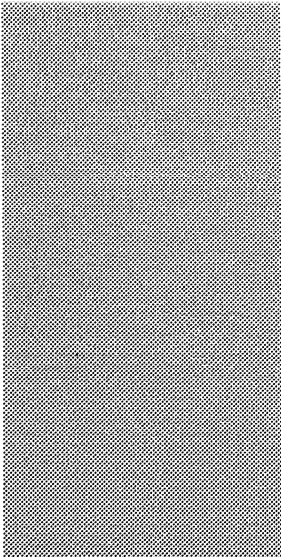
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Editorial

A recent visitor to the Pacific, Dr. Josef Estermann, from the Institute of Missiology, Missio, in Aachen, Germany, left us with a concise summary of the development of contextual theology worldwide, which we publish here, and a challenge to Pacific theologians to continue to develop the work of "Oceanic Theology"¹, not as something "from the periphery" of the Church and the world (as on European and North American maps) but with the "Liquid Continent" as central.

Theological reflection and education need to include both the island bases of indigenous cultures and the cross-currents and trade winds that bring many – people, ideas and influences – that soon "take root" and change the very nature and context of life in these Pacific islands.

One of the groups that have been actively involved in this kind of reflection since its beginning in 1989 is Weavers, an association of women in theological education, within the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. This year, Weavers, through SPATS in a joint venture with Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, published an anthology of theological reflections by women of the Pacific in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*.² The address given by Suliana Siwatibau at the book launch of this



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publication is included here and gives a taste of the range of thinking of Pacific women on the various contexts of their lives and the significance of their Christian faith.

An urgent area of concern for the Weavers group has been violence against women and children. The launching of The World Council of Churches in conjunction with the United Nations of the “Decade to Overcome Violence” (2001-2010) gave Weavers the impetus to focus its work and projects in the next three years on the issue of Violence against Women and Children. This was duly marked by a public forum organized by Weavers and held last April at the Pacific Theological College, Suva. Three of the papers published here were originally presented at that forum.

The statistics are sobering – more than two-thirds of the women in Pacific Island nations that have been surveyed report that they have been victims of domestic violence. Edwina Kotoisuva, from the Women’s Crisis Centre in Suva, presents a serious account of the darker side of island family life.

The response of the Law has been limited and slow to change, according to Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, a member of the Fiji legal profession. He cites the misguided tolerance that society seems to have for violence among people who are intimately related – violence that would be considered criminal among strangers. “It is a violation of the most vulnerable members of our society,” he writes, and “in direct contravention of...the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights” as well as “contrary to the teachings of all the great religions.”

What, then, is the theological response to this life-threatening reality for more than half the Pacific population? It is often asserted that the Churches are part of the problem: by a selective use of Biblical quotations to maintain male “rights” over women, often used to justify violence; by insisting on forgiveness and “reconciliation” without accountability or consequences for the perpetrator; by ignoring the reality of clergy sexual or physical abuse of spouses, other women and children, and by continued silence on this issue, even in schools of theology.³

Moral theologian Fr. Seluini ‘Akau’ola offers an alternative vision of the Church’s role by insisting on the obligation to condemn all forms



of violence against women and children. He also outlines some practical guidelines for a pastoral response to this problem.

On the broader issues of promoting an ethic of non-violence, and developing a Culture of Peace, we hear from two other authors: Rev. Russell Daye, in "Cheek Turning is Not Submission: Jesus' Ethic of Non-Violent Resistance", a sermon delivered to an Ecumenical gathering of seminary students last September and Aisake Casimira, a representative of ECREA, who spoke on "The Role of Women in Developing a Culture of Peace" at a recent workshop hosted by the Ministry of Reconciliation and Unity in Suva.

The issue of violence, more particularly the problem of violence against women and children, is a "global concern" that affects us very locally. While several Pacific nations have been caught up in civil war, ethnic or inter-racial violence, and an increase in violent crimes, we cannot ignore the violence that begins at home.

If Christ's "peace" was his farewell gift to us (Jn. 14:27), then it seems imperative that theologians concern themselves with interpreting and announcing that Word to the present generation, so much in need of this gift. The people who have contributed to this issue of the Pacific Journal of Theology have, we hope, initiated a dialogue for further reflection and commitment to action by all of us to bring about a more "pacific" world.

Notes

¹ He cites the agenda proposed by Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere PJT 4 (1990) 4-9 and others.

² See details under Book Note.

³ See, for example, the presentation by Joan A. Filemoni-Tofaeono, Domestic Violence Against Women, at the WOCATI General Assembly, Changmai, Thailand, 8-13 December, 2003, www.wocati.org



Dr. Josef Estermann

Dr. Josef Estermann, since 1998 has been the Director of the Institute of Missiology Missio (MWI) in Aachen, Germany and is in charge of the Oceania desk. He specializes in contextual theologies, intercultural philosophy, Latin American Liberation and indigenous theology, EATWOT. He has undertaken various studies in theology and philosophy in Lucerne, Nijmegen, Utrecht and Amsterdam B.Th. and M.Th. in Lucerne (CH) on fundamental theology. M.A. in Amsterdam on Levinas (Philosophy); Ph.D. in Utrecht (NL) on Modern Philosophy; missionary experience '90-'98 in Peru (Latin America). He is married and has 3 children.

Like a Rainbow or a Bunch of Flowers

Contextual theologies in a globalized world

At the time when neoliberal globalization tries to impose by political and economic – sometimes even military – power one unique model of living and behaving for the whole humankind, there are countless movements of indigenous people, members of religious traditions and cultural ways of life which claim for cultural and social self-determination and look for alternatives to this “real world” of McDonald, Microsoft and Coca Cola.

The same apparently contradictory tendencies can be observed also in the field of Church politics and ecclesiastical movements: On the one hand, there are quite some restorative efforts to re-establish a monolithic Church and a monocultural Christianity, on the other hand, we observe the emergence of local and indigenous churches in many parts of the world, of Catholic as well as of non-Catholic nature.

This paradox is reflected – last but not least – in the efforts of theological reflection: While the adherents of an ongoing homogenization and universalization of some culturally determinate theological model insist on one global theology – as the Vatican and the Evangelical fundamentalist movements do –, many theologians (men and women) all over the world do not accept any more one supra-cultural theology as umbrella for different

cultural, political, religious, social and pastoral circumstances. Under the label “contextual theologies”, churches in non-Western countries try to escape the hegemony of monolithic European and occidental theological thinking and church-building.

1. About “context” and “contextuality”

It is well known that the notion “context” has its *Sitz im Leben* in the sphere of hermeneutics and exegesis. “Context” is to be thought of as the implicit and determining non-linguistic factors present in any “text”. For the theory of exegetical interpretation, there is always some kind of “hermeneutical circle” between a text and its context, meaning that these two hermeneutical poles interpret each other mutually.

The use of the notions “context”, “contextual”, “contextuality” and “contextualization” in systematic and pastoral theology (not exegesis) has its historical origins in the late sixties and early seventies of the past century¹, when the so called “Young Churches” started to express – within the boarder socio-political framework of the post-colonial emancipation processes – their determination for cultural and social, but also ecclesiastical and theological independence from European and North American hegemony and domination. We have to be aware of the emancipatory roots of “contextuality” in the liberation movements of anti-(neo-) colonial struggle of the so called Third World countries, if we do not want to use the notion “contextual” simply as an equivalent of “circumstantial”, “embedded” or “situational” which very quickly can be interpreted as “relative” or even “casual”.

As a reality however, “contextual theology” is by no means a phenomenon of the 20th and 21st century. Theology has always been contextual, even – or just – when it declared itself as “absolute”, “universal”, “supratemporal” or even “divine” (*theologia perennis*): As there is no text without context, there is no theology – as written or oral “text” about God – without contextual marks such as language, time, customs, cultural codes and geographical references. Theologically speaking: Although God as a transcendent reality is supra-contextual, his incarnated Word is always contextual, and the human reflection and talking about this Word (e.g. theology) is even more contextual.

The very fact that the Christian Gospel has been expressed not just in one version, but in four different gospels, reminds us to be aware of the essential contextuality of theology (and the gospels are theology). The first Christian contextual theology is St. Paul's reflection on the Good News in his letters to the communities in the Greek and Roman world of the first century. The "context" of St. Paul's letter to the Romans for instance is quite different from the "context" of St. Mark's gospel. These are different contextual theologies.

But we have to be careful not to "trivialize" the whole issue of "contextuality" by referring to any theology whatsoever as "contextual", without taking into account the historical and social background of the struggle for liberation and independence. If we would do that, it would be the same as saying (theologically) that all human beings are "poor". As an analytical proposition, "all theology is contextual" is undoubtedly true (it can even be considered as tautological), but as a historical and empirical proposition, it is not true: there have been and there are still a good number of "de-contextualized" theologies, insofar as they are not sensitive to mechanisms of (cultural, political and social) domination and marginalization. The theology of the Spanish theologian of the *conquista*, Ginés de Sepúlveda, for instance, was of course very "contextual" in the broad sense of being rooted in Spanish Renaissance thinking, but was absolutely "non-contextual" in the strict sense of not questioning power relations and colonial domination.

We have therefore to distinguish between **two concepts of "contextuality"**:

1. **"Contextuality" in a broad sense** as a synonymous "determination by cultural, social, historical and economical factors". In this sense, any theology – in so far as it is "human" – is "contextual".
2. **"Contextuality" in a strict and more technical sense** as a label for just that kind of theologizing which is aware of underlying structures of cultural, social, political and economic domination on the one hand and marginalization and dependence on the other. "Contextual theology" in this strict (or narrow) sense is in its essence critical, committed and it comes "from below".



When I talk about “contextual theologies” within the framework of contemporary theology, I stick to the second concept and reserve the notion to those movements of theological thinking which started in the late sixties and early seventies of the last century. To be more precise, the origin of the theological notion of “contextuality” has to be found in a discussion which started in 1965 at the *Tainan Theological College* in Taiwan on “text and context in Theological Education”². This movement aimed at emancipating the Asian churches from being mere “mission fields” to become autonomous churches, establishing an indigenous staff in theological formation and creating a world-directed (and not just church-directed) ministry.

Under Shoki Coe as director of the *Theological Education Fund* (TEF) of the World Council of Churches (WCC), “contextualization” becomes a key word of this program: “By contextualization we mean the wrestling with God’s Word in such a way that the power of the incarnation which is the divine form of contextualization can enable us to follow his steps to contextualize”³. This conviction has already been expressed earlier, at a consultation on “Dogmatic or Contextual Theology” at Bossey in 1971, where “contextual theology” was described as “existential, fragmentary and dynamic”, whereas “dogmatic theology” was supposed to be determined by denomination, tradition and doctrine.⁴

During the third period of the TEF (1972-1977), there have been important inputs for the emergence of contextual theologies in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Contextual theology was at the time described as “essentially prophetic”, and contextualization as “a passionate cry for the recognition of the significance of this time and this place ... without which the Word is a dear word and the Christ a non-living lord”⁵. “Contextualization” is supposed to contain what the notion “indigenization” means, but is broader than this concept; “false” contextualization is an uncritical form of assimilation and adaptation, “true” contextualization is committed, critical and prophetic.

There could have been some connection between Paul Lehmann’s notion of “context”⁶ which was fundamental for the theology of revolution and indirectly for Latin American Liberation Theology, and the concept of “contextual theology” mentioned by Shoki Coe at the

first meeting of the North East Asia Association of Theological Schools in 1966. However it may be, the “liberationist” concept of contextuality has passed in 1973 from Asia to Latin America and Africa.⁷

2. Contextuality and inculturation

As we have seen, the very notion of “contextuality” in systematic theology has been in the beginning a category used more by Protestant theologians, although it was from the very beginning open to ecumenical exchange and was quickly assumed also by Catholic theologians.⁸ Almost at the same time, in Catholic theology – more specifically in missiology – emerged a notion that is often used as a synonymous for “contextuality”, i.e. “inculturation”.

Although there are many reasons to defend the thesis that “inculturation” is as old as the Church⁹, the concept was – according to some authors – used for the first time in 1959 by the Belgian missiologist Joseph Masson talking about the “inculturation of the Christian Gospel in non-Christian cultures”¹⁰ and introduced later in the theological debate by the Superior General of the Jesuits, Pedro Arrupe, at a meeting of his Order in 1978¹¹.

The (Catholic) notion of “inculturation” has its *Sitz im Leben* in the missiological debate in the aftermath of Vaticanum II. The missiological concepts of “acculturation” and “adaptation” which have been used before to describe the necessary *aggiornamento* of the Gospel in non-occidental cultures, should be replaced by a theologically more profound concept which is rooted in the central Christological event of the Incarnation. The analogy between “incarnation” and “inculturation” has been conceived as follows: The way God incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, the same way the Church (and liturgy, theology etc.) have to be “inculturated” in the many cultures where the Gospel is announced.

Although the concept of “inculturation” has been of decisive power in the post-conciliary process of establishing local churches and genuine indigenous theologies,¹² there has emerged also criticism, mainly from the so called “Young Churches” in Africa, Asia and Latin America.¹³ First of all, the very concept of “inculturation” presupposes some

kind of dualistic philosophical world view: On the one hand, there is the Gospel as a supra-cultural and timeless essence (in a Platonic or Aristotelian sense), and on the other hand, there are culturally determined changing circumstances. In this Eurocentric or Occidentocentric sense, “inculturation” could be conceived as cultural differentiation of the universal and supra-cultural core of Christian faith (whatever this may be).

Another problem with “inculturation” consists in the determination of the subjects and objects of this process: Who is inculturating what? The inculturation process after Vaticanum II started with liturgy and the ceremonial make up of church life, passed through the indigenization of clergy and ministries and reached theological reflection itself. Is it mainly liturgy (vernacular languages and customs), the Church itself (sacraments, ministries, organization), theology or the Gospel itself which should be “inculturated”? And who is responsible for this ongoing process: the missionary, the Church as a whole, the theologians or perhaps in the first place the Holy Spirit?

The Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris called this the “Greek-Roman model of inculturation” which – according to him - cannot be applied without serious difficulties to non-occidental cultural and religious traditions, because it presupposes a strict distinction between culture and religion.¹⁴ Stefan Silber distinguishes four types of “inculturation”: 1. Inculturation as purification of cultures; 2. Inculturation as Incarnation of the Word; 3. Inculturation as en-culturation of the missionaries; 4. Inculturation as encounter of cultures¹⁵. As any of these four models leads to an aporetic situation, Silber proposes the concept of “inculturated evangelization” in order to underline the process more than the content.

In spite of these limitations, the notion of “inculturation” stresses an important element the notion of “contextuality” does not: it is a process category, an acting paradigm, and not just a description of a factual state. This focus had also an impact on the “contextual” paradigm of theology: Instead of “contextual theologies”, more and more theologians started to talk about “contextualized” or even “contextualizing theologies”.¹⁶ Theologies are never fully “contextual”, but rather involved in an ongoing process of “contextualizing” or

“contextualization”.

The same questions concerning “inculturation” arise also in reference to “contextualization”: Who is contextualizing what? Does the theologian “adapt” or “assimilate” an almost meta-cultural content (the Gospel?; God?; the Church?; dogma?) to the concrete socio-political, historical and cultural situation? But here again, we have to take into account what Lessie Newbigin pointed out already in 1986, that “neither at the beginning, nor at any subsequent time is there or can there be a gospel that is not embodied in a culturally conditioned form of words.”¹⁷

Only that this statement refers to the broad (and even tautological) sense of “contextuality” and “contextualization” – and I am afraid that the same is the case with a certain understanding of “inculturation”. It is absolutely necessary to specify our talking about “contextualization” and “inculturation” in a sense Shoki Coe or as the Latin American Liberation Theology did in the seventies of the last century, i.e. applying the criteria of social and political involvement, prophetic commitment, critical attitude and bottom up procedure.

At the first International Colloquium on Contextual Theology of Asian Catholic theologians (1979 in Manila)¹⁸, the Filipino theologian Catalino G. Arévalo SJ – considered the “father” of Asian Liberation Theology – made a distinction between three forms of “contextual theologies”: 1. An indigenized or inculturated theology which expresses its contents by means of autochthonous forms of conceiving and representing the reality; 2. A theology at the encounter with world religions which tries to understand the Gospel from elements of other religions; 3. A theology which takes into account the social, economic, political and cultural modern context. Arévalo calls this last form “contextual theology in the strict sense”.¹⁹

According to Arévalo, the first form of contextual theology is significantly present in Africa, the second form in Asia, and the third form in Latin America, although he is aware that there is more and more interpenetration between the three forms. The founding of EATWOT (*Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians*) in 1976 has contributed very much to a mutual enrichment between continents and theological traditions, as well as between the (more Protestant) notion

of “contextualization” and the (more Catholic) notion of “inculturation”.

What has happened since this initial debate on “contextual theology” in the seventies of the last century? We try to review briefly the main lines of development and the specific topics of contextual theologies in Latin America, Africa and Asia in the last 25 years, and conclude this reflections with the question: What about Oceania? We leave at the moment the very interesting issue of a contemporary European contextual theology unexplored.

3. Latin American contextual theology

According to Arévalo, contemporary Latin American contextual theology is characterized by the fact that it “takes into account the social, economic, political and cultural modern context”. This statement reflects the fact that theologians and scholars of other disciplines all over the world identify recent theology in Latin America simply as “Liberation Theology”.²⁰ Although Latin American liberation theology was not the first explicit “contextual” theology of the so called Third World, it has been the one which became very well known not only in Europe and North America, but also in Africa, Asia and Oceania.

This fact is due mainly to two factors: 1. Liberation Theology in Latin America has had in the beginning such a strong political and social impact that not only political parties and governments on the continent, but even the US-administration felt obliged to react (the famous Santa Fe documents). 2. The adherence of the Latin American Bishops’ Conferences (CELAM) to Liberation Theology (Medellín 1968; Puebla 1976) caused much upheaval within the official Catholic Church, mainly the Vatican, and led to the famous “instructions” of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith “On some aspects of Liberation theology” (1984) and “On Christian freedom and liberation” (1986).²¹

Contextual theology in Latin America was from the very beginning in the sixties a movement which emerged from below, from popular social movements, basic communities, trade unions and peasants federations. The main “context” for the origin of Latin American

Liberation Theology was the situation of poverty of huge segments of the population and the scandalous social and economic differences between the “happy few” and the marginalized masses. The sensitivity of church leaders and theologians towards this specific context caused a severe crisis of the former neo-colonial theology of *cristiandad* as a typical de-contextualized Eurocentric way of theologizing.

The new paradigm elaborated expressively in the seventies and consolidated in the eighties of the past century, can be briefly summarized by means of five “novelties”:

1. A new method: Liberation theology does not use the traditional deductive way, but uses an inductive and dialectical method, starting with a concrete praxis and experience, passing through a critical reflection in the light of the Gospel and resulting in a new and liberating praxis.

2. A new subject: The main theological subject is not any more the professional theologian or the *magisterium*, but the people of God as constituted in basic communities and social movements. Professional theologians come at the second place and are some kind of “midwives”.

3. A new *locus theologicus*: Social and political struggle for liberation from dependence and poverty is no longer the exclusive field of moral theology, but the main *locus* for theological reflection. This implies that social sciences rather than philosophy are the main *ancillae theologiae* and hermeneutic mediation.

4. A new hermeneutical key: “liberation” becomes the fundamental hermeneutical key to understand the Christian message in all its aspects. Liberation Theology therefore is not a sectorial (or genitive), but fundamental theology.

5. A new praxis: Liberation theology gives priority to orthopraxis above orthodoxy. This new praxis is guided by a prophetic option for the poor and the denouncement of the “structures of sin”.

Due to internal as well as external factors²², this program underwent in the eighties some important modifications, although the main concerns and principles remain the same. At the first General Assembly (after the foundation) of EATWOT, 1981 in Delhi, the African and Asian representatives questioned the implicit “economicism” of Latin American Liberation Theology. According to them, classical Liberation Theology in Latin America ignores non-economic factors as gender,

culture, religious pluralism and ethnicity as fundamental in dealing with poverty, oppression and liberation. This interpellation led – together with other factors – to some kind of “cultural turn” in Liberation Theology in the late eighties of the last century: Discrimination based on gender difference and ethnic prejudices is recognized as essential for the situation of poverty and marginalization.

For Latin American theologians, this shift has not been a “betrayal” of the former principles of Liberation Theology, but rather a consequent evolution under new historical circumstances. Poor people do not belong just to a social class and are not only exploited by the international capital, but have also a colour, belong to a gender and to some particular culture and ethnic group. Liberation Theology began to diversify, according to the subjects and their specific situations. In the nineties, we can see the emergence of Latin American feminist theology, indigenous theology (*teología india*), black theology (*teología negra*), eco-theology, theology of religious pluralism and *latino* theology in the USA.²³

Latin American feminist theology has focused mainly on a theology of “every day’s life”, the oppression of women by *machismo* and patriachalism, as well as issues as complementarity, relationality and reciprocity in the relationship between the sexes. Latin American *mujerismo* also questions classical occidental feminism as Eurocentric and not culture-sensitive.²⁴

Indigenous theology (*teología india*) emerged as an attempt to think theologically from the life experiences and cosmovision of indigenous people. This attempt implies a severe criticism of traditional theology and philosophy which take as their framework some unquestioned principles of European philosophical thought. *Teología india* is not systematic theology in the technical sense, neither an academic issue, but rather an authentic expression of the faith and religious praxis of peoples marginalized because of their cultural and religious heritage. At present, indigenous theology in Latin America is very attentively observed by the Vatican, as it questions some sensitive issues of Church life (ministries; liturgy) and proposes non-occidental approaches to Christology and theology (the conception of God).²⁵

Black theology in Latin America has emerged almost isolated

from similar movements in the USA and in (South) Africa. *Teología negra* in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and the Caribbean tries to integrate elements of African origin into theological discourse, but does not forget the aspect of poverty, racial discrimination and marginalization in their societies. It is a Liberation Theology *sui generis*.²⁶

Eco-theology has a strong feminist strand in Latin America (*ecofeminismo*), but also links to indigenous thinking and classical Liberation Theology of creation (Leonardo Boff). The emergence of indigenous theology has brought to mind to many theologians in Latin America, that the continent is by no means homogenous in religious terms, but rather a pluri-religious continent as Asia and Africa are taken for granted. This awareness led to a new form of theology of religious pluralism which explicitly understands itself as “liberation theology of religious pluralism”.²⁷

Latino theology in the United States has become a very innovative and interesting ecumenical effort to elaborate a liberating theology in the context of a capitalist country belonging to the so called First World. It is the theological expression of the Hispanics as a cultural, ethnic and social minority and focuses on issues as global migration, transformation of religious identity, popular Catholicism, everyday life and globalization.²⁸

4. Asian contextual theology

Comparing to Latin America, the Asian context is quite different. Christian religion is in most countries a small minority, surrounded by other world religions with a long and rich tradition. Cultural and ethnic variety is significantly broader, and economical and political differences between parts of Asia are much more visible than in Latin America. Although it is true that one of the main contexts is religious pluralism and the challenge therefore consists in establishing a contextual theology of interreligious dialogue, it is also a fact that poverty and injustice are issues theology in Asia has to deal with.

Until the sixties of the past century, Catholic theology in Asia has been characterized by a neothomist synthesis of the modern world, and Protestant theology in Asia followed the discussions Europe was



struggling with. Church life and theology in Asia were like a European exclave in foreign territory; Asian Christians – especially ministers and priests – had to undergo first a cultural transformation of becoming Europeans and Westerners (to undergo the so called “Hellenistic circumcision”)²⁹ in order to become Christians. With the Christian faith, the occidental cultural and axiomatic heritage has been exported as well. This colonialist and neo-colonialist attitude started to change in the sixties of the past century, partly due to political independence and the process of self-determination, partly due to intra-ecclesial and theological transformations.

It is not easy to find some common denominator of all Asian contextual theologies, from the Philippines to China, from India to Singapore, from Myanmar to Lebanon.³⁰ The religious, social, cultural, economic and political contexts are very different, and the theological answers to these challenges have to be of course very different too. Much more than in Latin America – where the common label “Liberation Theology” represents a good part of contextual theologizing – Asian contextual theology has to be spelled out in a plural form: as Asian theologies.

Such as in other continents, we find actually in Asia, alongside with contextual theologies rooted in the concrete situation of people and their needs, many de-contextualized forms of theology which continue with a Westernized form of doing theology and building up the church. There is often the situation of two parallel paradigms of theology and church: On the one hand, you can find contextual theologies committed with the poor, the excluded and the marginalized (*Minjung*-, *Dalit*-, *Hwajeng*-, *Waterbuffalo*-theology), on the other hand there persist in Asia conservative theologies, either on the Protestant or Catholic side, which do neither worry about misery and discrimination, nor about religious pluralism and cultural self-determination.

As the Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris pointed out, Asian contextual theology has to establish a threefold dialogue: 1. with the poor and the excluded; 2. with other religions; 3. with Asian cultures. This means that Asian contextual theology is a specific Asian variant of Liberation Theology³¹, taking interreligious and intercultural dialogue as main challenges in order to overcome oppression, poverty and

marginalization of the huge masses. On the occasion of the meeting of the Senate of the "South East Asia School of Theology" (GST), 1972 in Bangkok, the so called "Asian critical principle" has been discussed extensively which should become the contextual framework for Asian theologizing³². This "critical principle" is based on seven characteristics typical for the Asian context:

- a) Plurality of races, peoples, cultures, religions, ideologies and social institutions.
- b) Colonial past of most countries.
- c) Ongoing process of national self-determination, development and modernization.
- d) Struggle for identity and cultural integrity in the modern world.
- e) Alternative life forms and world views offered by other religions.
- f) Search for a social order different from the established western models.
- g) Minority status of the Christians.

Although Japan was the first Asian country which developed a contextual theology different from the Western tradition, countries as the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Korea have been the ones where most innovations in the field of theology took place in the seventies and eighties of the past century. Recently, there are also new impulses by theologians from Indonesia, China and Pakistan whereas countries as Vietnam, Myanmar or Cambodia remain theologically isolated and de-contextualized. The founding of EATWOT in 1976 and the establishment of an Asian network (Ecumenical Federation of Theologians in Asia EFTA and Asian Theological Conferences ATC)³³, the founding of the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) and its Office of Theological Concerns, the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS) are just some of the marking stones in the development of an Asian network of contextual theologies.³⁴

The emergence of a contextual theology in the Philippines has to be seen in the context of a situation of increasing social and economic injustice and political dictatorship in the seventies and eighties of the past century. As an answer to this situation, among the popular and rural

movements, as well as from the basic Christian communities of the country emerged something like a grassroots' Liberation theology in the sense of a theology of struggle and revolution.³⁵ It was Catalino Arévalo who introduced Latin American Liberation Theology in the Philippines (and in Asia) which underwent substantial transformation by cultural Filipino aspects.

Contextual theology in India had to cope with quite another context, as it is challenged by religious pluralism as well as by poverty and social discrimination (caste system). The first attempts to develop an autochthonous Indian theology in the seventies was almost entirely limited to theologians inspired by Indian philosophy and Hindu thought of the Sanskrit tradition (i.e. Amalorpavadass). Just in recent years, theologians have taken up the challenge of the *adivasi* (tribals) and *dalit* (untouchables) and develop an Indian variant of Liberation Theology (Massey, Lourdu Swamy).³⁶ Religious pluralism remains a constant challenge to an inculturated Christology and theology, as the Vatican document *Dominus Iesus* points out very critically. Contemporary contextual Indian theology finds itself under two fires: dogmatic theology of Western style (Catholic as well as Protestant) on the one hand, and militant fundamentalist Hindu movements (Hindutva) on the other hand.

Contrary to Church hierarchy which is quite conservative and Western minded, contextual theology in Sri Lanka took up already in the seventies of the past century the challenge of social misery, injustice and discrimination, as well as the dialogue with Buddhism as the dominant religious tradition. Figures as Tissa Balasuriya and Aloysius Pieris tried to "inculturate" Christian faith in a fruitful and respectful dialogue with Buddhism, demonstrating that "theology in Asia is Christian revelation of non-Christian experiences of liberation"³⁷.

The situation in China is very particular because of the repressive political situation since the Maoist revolution; the most innovative and promissory forms of contextual Chinese theology have been elaborated in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan had a leading role in the seventies for the emergence of a contextual Chinese theology, committed to the worker class and the poor people. One of its theologians, Shoki Coe (Huang Chiong-Hui) coined the term

“contextual theology” and developed together with John E.Y. Cheng a theological current called “the love of God-man in action”. Several theologians in Taiwan and Hong Kong try at the moment to articulate their efforts with the movement of “cultural Christians” in Mainland China, taking into account the millenarian tradition of Chinese thought (Taoism, Daoism, Confucianism).³⁸

Church and theology in (South-) Korea have traditionally been very conservative and Westernized. In the sixties and seventies of the past century, however, they started to take the political and social problems of oppression and repression into account in their reflections and to elaborate a theology of the “oppressed people” (*minjung*) and fight against dictatorship and poverty. Protestant theologians as Suh Nam-Dong and Kim Yong-Bok developed a Korean Liberation theology, whereas Catholic theologians as Jemin Ri stressed more the aspect of “inculturation” and even “inconfucionization”. Another challenge today is to include shamanistic thought and feminist theological reflection.³⁹

In times of globalization and the supposed “clash of civilization”, Asian contextual theology is at the moment perhaps the most promising as well as questioned form of contextual theologies emerging in the Third World. New approaches for a pluralistic and inclusive theology of religion (Dupuis), for a non-exclusivist Christology (Amaladoss) as well as for alternative ecclesiological models (de Mesa) experience harsh criticism from the Vatican *magisterium* and from evangelical circles in the Protestant churches.

5. African contextual theology

The African continent has not only the shortest history of Christianity – if we leave out of consideration the Christianization in the first centuries of North Africa⁴⁰ –, but also the shortest period of contextual theologies. This fact is due to colonial history and the process of decolonization which started in most countries just in the sixties and seventies of the past century and has not yet ended completely, concerning cultural and economic dependence from the former colonial powers. The same – or it is even worse – can be said for the churches and theology, since the constitution of a native African church structure and an African contextual



theology is of relative recent time.

Although most of the European missionaries applied in Africa a European theology, either of Catholic or Protestant origin, defending the superiority of Western civilization, some of them started to elaborate typical African forms of reflection. One of them was the Belgian missionary Placide Tempels who caused with his "Bantu Philosophy"⁴¹ a great impact among young African theologians and philosophers. But the first African contextual theologies did not emerge from the mainstream churches, but rather from the so called African Independent Churches (AIC) which stressed from their very beginning typical African topics such as pneumatology, prophecy, dreams, healing and glossolaly.

Contextual theology in Africa – perhaps excepted South African theology – was from the very origins oriented towards ethnological and cultural research, and the main concern was not elaborating a socially and politically committed theology, but rather a methodological framework which does not rely any longer on the scholastic and dogmatic heritage of European and colonial theology. The debate about an "African Christian theology" started at the end of the fifties at the Lovanium University in Kinshasa and reached a first climax at the Conference on African theology in Ibadan (Nigeria) in 1966, organized by the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).

With the founding of EATWOT in Daressalaam in 1976 and the first conference in Accra the following year, the development of a contextual African theology entered a new and decisive phase. Influenced by Latin American Liberation theology, the challenge of "liberation" came to the become the main focus of many African theologians, as the former "ethno-theology" did not afford sufficient theoretical background for the struggle of marginalized Africa. So African theology and the so called Black theology – of US as well as South African origin – met and entered into a mutual enrichment. The experience of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, where church leaders and theologians fought side by side with political leaders, had an impact on other African countries and their struggle for political, cultural and religious self-determination (*négritude*; Africanity).

Contextual theology in South Africa has dealt mainly with the abolition of apartheid and the theological criticism of the fundamentalist

theology of the white *boeren* which had legitimized the segregation of the races and the superiority of the whites for a long time. So contextual theology in South Africa has always been committed and politically relevant theologizing. It took elements from Black Theology in the USA, as well as the principles of Latin American Liberation Theology, but applied them to the very specific context of the anti-apartheid struggle and the ongoing process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). As examples, we can mention Bishop Desmond Tutu and theologians as Charles Villa-Vicencio, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, John W. de Gruchy, James R. Cochrane and Denise Ackermann.⁴²

Although many African countries were affected by wars, corruption, dictatorships, impoverishment and ethnic discrimination, few theologians took up the challenge and developed a genuine African Liberation Theology. Already at the EATWOT meeting in Accra (1977), the African theologians criticized their Latin American colleagues for being too dogmatic in their “economicist” analysis of poverty and oppression. They rather proposed that a genuine African contextual theology should stress the ethnic and cultural dimensions of oppression and liberation. The concept of “inculturation” became in Africa something as a theological paradigm, and ethnological studies were taken as starting points for theological reflections.

So we can find innovative theologies in the field of Christology (Christ as the great Ancestor), ecclesiology (the Church as family) and ministry (healing; prophecy; empowerment), but also in liturgy (i.e. the Zairian rite in the Catholic Church) and moral theology (on polygamy and marital theology). The encounter with Latin American theologians of Liberation resulted in some African colleagues becoming conscious of the fact that theology cannot deal only with “inculturation”, but has to give answers to the huge problems of social injustice, marginalization, lack of democracy, human rights and globalization.

In several countries, there has emerged recently a genuine African Liberation Theology, not based on Marxist analysis or class struggle as the “classical” Latin American Liberation Theology was, but more on biblical and indigenous elements. As the most creative countries in contextual theologizing can be mentioned Ghana, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and, of

course, South Africa. Many of the famous African theologians teach actually at some European or North American universities (Jean-Marc Ela, Bénédet Bujo, Eugene Uzukwu), because of the political situation at home or because of the lack of academic capacities and facilities in Africa.⁴³

6. And what about Pacific contextual theology?

On most world maps, Oceania is cut into two parts by the right and left margins; it has geographically a marginalized position and has been theologically marginalized as well for a long time. Although the World Mission Conference in 1980 took place in Melbourne, most of the delegates were not yet aware of the emergence and development of a genuine Pacific Church and theology. Three years later – at the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Vancouver – the South Pacific was already present, mainly due to the concientization made by women on the nuclear colonialization of the South Pacific and the challenge this poses to theology.⁴⁴

Latin America, Asia and Africa have ever since been considered as Third World continents and their theologians have been included without hesitation as members of EATWOT. But what about Oceania, where a majority of the population (Australia, New Zealand) belongs rather to the First than the Third World?⁴⁵ Why is Pacific theology often mentioned in one breath with Asian theology?⁴⁶ Can we speak of some common features of Pacific theologizing, or rather of different forms of Pacific theology? Is Melanesian theology different from the Polynesian or Micronesian variant, and how do they relate to contextual theologies in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand?

As long as there was no genuine Pacific contextual theology, Oceania was considered either as a theological *terra incognita* or as an appendix to Western theology, either of Catholic or of Protestant type. With the emergence of contextual theologies in Oceania, this continent comes in the sight of theological reflection and at the same time appears as a heterogeneous enterprise, as a contextual theology in a plural form:

Contextual Pacific Theologies.

In 1969, the *South Pacific Association of Theological Schools* (SPATS) was established; at the moment, it has 25 member schools. In 1976, the third Assembly of the Pacific Council of Churches was held in Port Moresby and raised the quest for the "Pacific Christ".⁴⁷ In 1986, the first *Evangelical Consultation on Pacific Theology* took place in Papua New Guinea, where Sione 'Amanaki Havea presented the outline of what would be called later "Coconut Theology".⁴⁸ In 1989, on the occasion of a workshop on *Women and Ministry* held by SPATS and the Pacific Conference of Churches in Tonga, "Weavers" (*Women in Theological Education Programme*) has been founded as the women theological education committee of SPATS.

In 1990, Ilaitia Sevatia Tuwere presented the outline of a "Oceanic Theology" and an agenda for the theological tasks of the Church in Oceania.⁴⁹ In 1994, the first *Pacific Conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* (EATWOT) took place in Suva (Fiji)⁵⁰. In 1997, there was the *Second Consultation on Quest for Pacific Theology*⁵¹. At the Fifth General Assembly of EATWOT held from September, 24 to October 1, 2001 in Quito, Ecuador, there was just one participant from Oceania (Kafoa Anthony Salomone, Academic Dean at the Pacific Theological College in Suva/Fiji).

Several theological journals in Oceania took up the challenge of contextuality. The *Pacific Journal of Theology* which is the Journal of the *South Pacific Association of Theological Schools* (SPATS) and which is based in Suva (Fiji), has fostered from its founding in 1989 the study of contextual theologies in the South Pacific. There are two journals from the Melanesian context, which are worth to be mentioned: *Catalyst* (since 1971), the Journal of the *Melanesian Institute* in Goroka, and the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* (since 1985) of the *Melanesian Association of Theological Schools* (MATS), based in Lae, both from Papua New Guinea.

From the Australian context, there are specially three interesting journals to be highlighted which publish contextualized theological reflection: *Nelen Yubu* (Leura, NSW), *Pacifica*, edited by the *Pacifica Theological Studies Association* (Brunswick East, Victoria) and the *South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies* which is published by SPAMS (South Pacific Association



for Mission Studies) and edited in North Turramurra NSW. A relative new publication is *Vashiti's Voice*, a "journal exploring theologies for a just future", based in Auckland.⁵²

In 2001, SPATS organized a *Contextual Theology Conference*, held at Nadave, Bau, Fiji, from October, 7 to 10, where the three principal questions on *Contextual Theology* were tackled: 1. What is Contextual Theology? (by Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere); 2. Why Contextual Theology? (Keiti Ann Kanongata'a); 3. How is Contextual Theology done? (Jovili Meo). It is one of the first attempts to deal systematically with contextual theology (or theologies) in the South Pacific context.⁵³ The contributions for this Conference have been published in the *Pacific Journal of Theology*.⁵⁴

This conference (phase one) is part of a four years program established by SPATS. In 2002 and 2003, there will be sub-regional conferences on Contextual Theologies. The first one in Tonga, has already taken place in November 2002, organized by the *Sia'atoutai Theological College*.⁵⁵ In October 2003, a group of Tongan theologians (mainly Methodists and Catholics) established the "Ecumenical Association of Tongan Theologians", dedicated to the further exploration of a specific Tongan Contextual Theology. In November 2003, the sub-regional meeting in New Caledonia is supposed to take place and will deal with the issue of "Identity and Citizenship". In 2004, the Fijian sub-regional meeting will take place at *Davunilevu Theological College* in Suva (it has been postponed from October 2003); the same goes up for the Melanesian and the Micronesian sub-regions.

After these sub-regional meetings (phase two), the outcomes of the sub-regional conferences will be systematized and will be the basis for a regional Pacific Conference in 2004 or 2005 (phase three), where also representatives of other continents should be invited. The final document will be used as a discussion paper for Pacific church leaders and theological educators to make a final paper to be Oceania's contribution into the world arena of contextual theology (phase four).

Comparing with the characteristics of Contextual Theologies in Latin America, Africa and Asia, we can appreciate a *sui generis* form of Pacific contextual theology which is neither classical Liberation Theology, nor theology of religious pluralism, nor mere theology of inculturation. It stresses the critical and Christological aspects, it deals in the first place

with topics as “land”, “place”, “community” and “spirituality”, it takes indigenous thinking and experience as a very important *locus theologicus*, and it just started to deal with the impact of globalization and its theological consequences. Especially for the Fijian context, interreligious dialogue and a contextual theology of religious pluralism will be vital issues for the future. The impact of feminist contextual theologizing in the Pacific becomes more and more important, due to the network “Weavers” and the increasing presence of women theologians.⁵⁶

There is a world map called “The World Down Under” where the North is at the bottom and the South on top, where Oceania is in the upper half of the centre, and where Europe lies in the lower part on the left and right side, cut into two parts by both margins. World views (and maps are world views) are always contextual. For the Pacific perspective, Oceania is not just a “huge blue spot” – the “Liquid Continent” – at the edge of the world, but the starting point and *locus theologicus* for a genuine and authentic theologizing. Of course, it will take some time to des-Hellenize and des-Europeanize theological ideas and methods, but the first steps are made, and many more are planned.

Notes

¹ See: F.R. Kinsler, Mission and Context: The Current Debate About Contextualization, in: Evangelical Missions Quarterly 14 (1978), nr. 1, 23-29, spec. 24. For an overview of the origins, the development and the diversification of Contextual Theologies see: Fritz Frei, Kontextuelle Theologie, in: Giancarlo Collet (ed.), Theologien der Dritten Welt. EATWOT als Herausforderung westlicher Theologie und Kirche, Immensee 1990, 142-161.

² See: Theological Education Fund (ed.), Ministry in Context. The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970-77), Bromley 1972.

³ Shoki Coe, Theological Education, WCC Geneva 1974, 11.

⁴ Report of the Consultation on “Dogmatic or Contextual Theology”, August 26-31, 1971, Bossey 1972 (manuscript). Louis J. Luzbetak mentions as predecessors of “contextual theology”: the journal “Practical Anthropology” (1953) which became later “Missiology” (1973); Helmut



Richard Niebuhr's (1894-1962) lectures "Christ and Cultures"; Eugene Albert Nidas' classical works "Customs and Cultures" (1954) and "Message and Mission" (1960) (Louis J. Luzbetak, *Signs of Progress in Contextual Methodology*, in: *Verbum SVD* 22 (1981) 39-57; spec. 53-57).

⁵ Theological Education Fund (ed.), *Learning in context*, London 1973, 13.

⁶ See: Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context*, London 1963.

⁷ For a brief overview of the development of contextual theologies in the seventies of the 20th century, see: R.J. Schreiter, *Issues Facing Contextual Theologies Today*, in: *Verbum SVD* 21 (1980), 267-278.

⁸ In 1979 there took place the first International Colloquium on Contextual Theology of Asian Catholic theologians (Manila), organized by University of Santo Tomas (UST), Association of Catholic Universities of the Philippines (ACUP) and the Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio Aachen (MWI).

⁹ See: A.A. Roest Crolius, *What is so new about Inculturation?*, in: *Gregorianum* 59 (1978) 721.

¹⁰ *Mission et cultures non-chrétiennes. Rapports et compte rendu de la XXIXe semaine de missiologie Louvain 1959, Tournai 1959*, specially 9 and 316.

¹¹ P. Arrupe, *Discurso inicial a la Congregación de Procuradores* (27.9.1978), in: *idem*, *La identidad del jesuita en nuestros tiempos*, Santander 1981, 36.

¹² For a very good and helpful bibliography on "inculturation" up to 1994 see: Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio (ed.), *Annotated Bibliography on Inculturation. Theology in Context—Supplements No. 9*, Aachen 1994 (with 1815 titles).

¹³ As an example, see: S. Rayan, *Flesh of India's Flesh*, in: *Jeevadhara* 6 (1976) 259-267. Cf. also: Stefan Silber, *Typologie der Inkulturationsbegriffe: vier Aporien. Eine Streitschrift für einen neuen Begriff in einer notwendigen Debatte*, in: Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio (ed.), *Jahrbuch für Kontextuelle Theologien 1997*, Frankfurt a.M. 1997, 117-136.

¹⁴ A. Pieris, *Theologie der Befreiung in Asien*, vol. 9, „Theologie der Dritten Welt“, Freiburg 1986, 79-91.

¹⁵ Op. cit.

¹⁶ Shoki Coe mentions that the Theological Education Fund did not talk (from 1975 onwards) anymore of "contextual" or "contextualized", but of "contextualizing theology" (Shoki Coe, *Contextualizing Theology*, in: G.H. Anderson and Th.F. Stransky (eds.), *Mission Trends No. 3; Third World*

Theologies, New York-Ramsey-Toronto-Grand Rapids 1976, 19-24).

¹⁷ L. Newbigin, Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture, WCC Geneva 1986, 4.

¹⁸ Official Proceedings International Colloquium on Contextual Theology. Organized by University of Santo Tomas (UST), Association of Catholic Universities of the Philippines (ACUP), Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio Aachen (MWI). June, 20-23, 1979, Manila, Philippines, in: *Philippiniana Sacra* 14 (1979), Nr. 40, 5-212.

¹⁹ See: Catalino G. Arévalo, Was ist kontextuelle Theologie?, in: *Den Glauben neu verstehen. Beiträge zu einer asiatischen Theologie*, Freiburg 1981, 20-34, specially 23-26. Idem, Some prenotes on "Doing theology". Man, society, and history in Asian contexts, in: Emerito P. Nacpil and Douglas J. Elwood (eds.), *The human and the holy. Asian perspectives in Christian theology*, Quezon City, 1978, 189-212.

²⁰ For a brief history and description in English language of early Latin American Liberation Theology, see: D.W. Ferm, *Profiles in Liberation*, Connecticut 1988, 114-193; idem, *Third World Liberation Theologies*, New York 1986, 3-58; Ph. Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, New York 1987; Ch. Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, Chicago 1991.

²¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (ed.), *Instruction on certain aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* SACBC, O.J. Pretoria 1984 (Pastoral Action; 38); Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (ed.), *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, in: Samok, (1986) 103-108, H. 106, 98-128.

²² Among the internal factors, we can mention: An increasing awareness of the diversity of oppression and poverty; the "irruption" of women, black and indigenous people into theology and church life; increasing ecological consciousness. Among the external factors, there are: The collapse of real socialism; increasing pressure by the Vatican on Liberation theologians and the conservative politics of bishops' assignation; the debate within EATWOT on Liberation Theology.

²³ All these movements have of course a larger history and can be traced back in some cases even to the seventies of the last century. From October, 1 to 5, 1979, there was held for example in Topeyac (Mexico) an international seminar on the topic of "Latin American woman and the praxis and theology of liberation", and one month later in Chiapas a conference on "The movement of the Indio's and Liberation Theology". – Although Latino Theology (theology elaborated by the Latin American immigrants in the USA) does not belong geographically to Latin America,

it is part of the same tradition and understands itself explicitly as "liberation theology" (see: Orlando O. Espín and Miguel H. Díaz (eds.), *From the Heart of our People: Latina/o Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, New York 1999).

²⁴ For a first introduction: Ana María Bidegain, *La mujer en la historia de la teología de la liberación*, in: *Teología y Liberación. Ensayos en torno a la obra de Gustavo Gutiérrez*, Lima 1989-1991, vol. 3: *Religión, cultura y ética*, 43-70. *Variae*, *Teólogos de la liberación hablan de la mujer*, San José 1986. I. Gebara and M.C.L. Bingemer, *A mulher faz teologia*, Petrópolis 1986; I. Gebara and M.C.L. Bingemer (ed.), *María, mae de Deus a mae dos pobres*, Petrópolis 1987; L. Boff, *María, mulher profética e libertadora - a piedad mariana na teologia da libertação*, in: *REB 38 Fsc.* 149 (1978), 39-56; L. Boff, *O rosto materno de Deus*, Petrópolis 1979; M.C.L. Bingemer, 'Alégrense' (Lc. 8-10) o la mujer en el futuro de la Teología de la Liberación, in: *Teología y Liberación. Ensayos en torno a la obra de Gustavo Gutiérrez*, Lima 1989-1991, vol.1: "Perspectivas y desafíos", 215-246.

²⁵ Concerning *Teología India*, see: Eleazar López Hernández, *Teología india hoy*, in: *Christus 56* (1991) 648, 2-26; idem, *Indigenous contributions to the churches on the occasion of the fifth century*, in: *International Review of Mission 82* (1993) 325, 51-56; idem, *Teología India. Antología*, Cochabamba 2000; Elisabeth Steffens, *Die Theologien der indianischen Völker Abia Yalas aus der Sicht ihrer Subjekte*, in: *Jahrbuch für Kontextuelle Theologien 2001*, Frankfurt a.M. 2001, 193-220; Thomas Schreijäck, *Auf der Suche nach der Erde ohne Leid*, in: *Orientierung 18* (2002) 66, 189-193.

²⁶ Referring to *Teología negra*, see: Antônio Aparecido da Silva, *La teología moral y la cuestión negra*, in: *Páginas*, 13 (1988) 89-94, H. 89-90, 67-83; idem, *Existe um Pensar Teológico Negro?*, São Paulo 1998; idem, *Caminos y contextos de la teología afro en el panorama de la teología Latinoamericana*, Navarra 2001. Concerning *Liberation Theology and interreligious dialogue*, see: Paul F. Knitter, *Hacia una teología de la liberación de las religiones*, in: *Alternativas*, 8 (2001) 18-21, H. 20/21, 37-64; idem, *Cosmic confidence or preferential option?*, in: *Bangalore Theological Forum*, 23, H. 4, 1-24.

²⁷ Concerning *ecofeminismo* and *mujerista* theology, see: Ivonne Gebara, *Ecofeminismo. Algunas desafíos teológicos*, in: *Alternativas*, 7 (2000) 15-17, H. 16/17, 173-185; Mary Judith Ress, *Las fuentes del ecofeminismo*.

Una genealogía, in: Con-spirando, (1998) 23-26, H. 23, 2-8; Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En la lucha - In the struggle. Elaborating a mujerista theology - a Hispanic women's liberation theology*, Minneapolis 1993; eadem, *Mujerista theology. A theology for the twenty-first century*, Maryknoll 1996; Concerning Liberation Theology and interreligious dialogue, see: Paul F. Knitter, *Hacia una teología de la liberación de las religiones*, in: Alternativas, 8 (2001) 18-21, H. 20/21, 37-64; idem, *Cosmic confidence or preferential option?*, in: Bangalore Theological Forum, 23, H. 4, 1-24.

²⁸ For latino theology, see: Orlando O. Espín and Miguel H. Díaz (eds.), *From the Heart of our People: Latina/o Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, New York 1999.

²⁹ The concept of “Hellenistic circumcision” – coined by the author – stresses the historical fact that after St. Paul’s dropping of the Jewish circumcision as a necessary condition for becoming a Christian (Ac 15), the pressure to interiorize Roman-Greek culture and philosophy became stronger and stronger. This “hellenization” of Christian faith and dogma resulted in the fact that for instance candidates for the Catholic priesthood in non-European cultural contexts were obliged to “circumcise” themselves in terms of the Hellenistic heritage in order to become priests. Up to the present days, the assimilation of Scholastic philosophy – and therefore of Occidental-Hellenistic culture and worldview – is a prerequisite for the study of theology and for becoming a priest or deacon in the Catholic Church.

³⁰ As a good compendium of Asian theology, see the series: John C. England, Jese Kuttianimmattathil, John M. Prior, Lily A Quintos, David Suh Kwang-sun, Janice Wickeri (eds.), *Asian Christian Theologies. A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources*, Maryknoll – New York 2002ff. The first volume which came out in 2002, deals with Asia as Region, South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) and Astral Asia (Aotearoa-New Zealand, Australia). The second volume deals with Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam) and will be published soon (2004). The third volume will be on Northeast Asia (China, Hong Kong, Macau, Inner-Asia incl. Tibet and Mongolia, Japan, Korea and Taiwan) and be published probably in 2006. It is surprising that Australia and New Zealand are included in a volume on Asian Contextual Theology.

³¹ Pieris considered Latin American Liberation Theology as a Western type of theologizing, using the concepts of development and Marxist

socialism as methodological framework. However, he was convinced that it could contribute substantially in elaborating a genuine Asian Liberation Theology which takes into account the cosmo-teo-thantric context of religious pluralism and deep spirituality. See: A. Pieris, Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-cultural Guidelines, in: V. Fabella (ed.), Asia's struggle for full humanity, Maryknoll 1980, 75-95.

³² See: D.P. Niles, Toward a Framework for „Doing” Theology in Asia, in: E. Nacpil and D.J. Elwood, The Human and the Holy, Manila 1978, 267-290.

³³ Under the umbrella of EATWOT, the Asian members organized the following Asian Theological Conferences (ATC): 1979 in Colombo, 1984 in Hong Kong, 1989 in Suanbo (Korea), and 1995 in Yogyakarta (Indonesia). The first General Assembly of EATWOT took place in 1981 in Delhi, and the fourth in 1996 Tagaytay (Manila); there has been a Asian Women Conference in 1985 in Manila, and a Filipino Women Conference in 1992 in Manila.

³⁴ The FABC was initiated in 1970 and constituted formally in 1971; the first Assembly was held in 1974 in Taipei. The FABC's Office of Theological Concerns has been a very dynamic organism of the Catholic Church to foster contextual theologies in Asia. The Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS) was founded in 1997 and organizes a conference every two years.

³⁵ For some references, see: Karl M Gaspar, Group Media and the “Theology of Struggle” in the Philippines, in: Group Media Journal, 6 (1987), H. 1, S. 7-10; Mary Rosaria Battung (ed.), Religion and society. Towards a theology of struggle, Manila 1988; Eleazar S. Fernandez, Toward a theology of struggle, Maryknoll 1994.

³⁶ As references: James Massey, Ingredients for a Dalit theology, in: M. E. Prabhakar (ed.), Towards a Dalit Theology, Delhi 1989, 57-63; Christopher Shelke, Dalit theology. Emergence and emergency, in: Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft, 50 (1994), H. 4, 257-273; James Massey, Movements of liberation. Theological roots and visions of Dalit theology, in: Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology, 12 (2000), 52-68.

³⁷ As Aloysius Pieris put it synthetically at the end of his keynote paper at the First Asian Theological Conference (ATC I) of EATWOT in Colombo (A. Pieris, Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation: Some Religio-cultural Guidelines, in: V. Fabella (ed.), Asia's struggle for full humanity, Maryknoll 1980, 75-95, 95). See also: Tissa Balasuriya, Conceptual tools and framework for a new paradigm in Asian Theology,

in: *Theology for our times*, (1998) 5, 119-124.

³⁸ For some references, see: Jean Charbonnier, *Towards a theology of the Chinese church*, in: *Indian theological studies*, 26 (1989), H. 1/2, 171-180; Baoping Kan, *Theology in the Contemporary Chinese Context*, in: *Chinese Theological Review*, 11 (1996/97), H. 2, 112-124; Shengjie Cao, *Feminist Theology and the Chinese Church*, in: *Chinese Theological Review*, 15 (2001), 63-71.

³⁹ See: Jin-Kwan Kwon, *Minjung theology and its future task for people's movement. A theological reflection on the theme of religion, power and politics in the Korean context*, in: *CTC Bulletin*, 10 (1991), H. 2/3, 16-22; Dong-Kun Kim, *Korean Minjung Theology in history and mission*, in: *Studies in World Christianity*, 2 (1996), H. 2, 167-182; Jong Chun Park, *A paradigm change in Korean indigenization theology. From theology of 'sincerity' (...) to 'interliving' (...) theology*, in: *Korea Journal of Systematic Theology*, 2 (1998), 25-44.

⁴⁰ There are contemporary African theologians who remind us rightly of the rich African Christian traditions between the second and seventh century A.D. and the fundamental theological contributions by African thinkers as Tertullian, Origenes, Clemens and Augustine. On the other hand, this tradition was embedded into the Roman culture and there were included very few genuine African elements. See: E.W. Fasholé-Luke, *Footpaths and signposts to African Christian theology*, in: *Bulletin de Théologie Africaine* 3 (1981), 19-40.

⁴¹ His thoughts were published first as series of journal contributions in Flemish (1945-46), before appearing in French in 1949 (*La Philosophie Bantou*, Paris 1949); the English edition was published ten years later (*Bantu Philosophy*, Paris 1959).

⁴² See: Desmond M. Tutu, *The Rainbow people of God. The making of a peaceful revolution*, New York 1994; Ch. Villa-Vicencio, *A theology of reconstruction. Nation-building and human rights*, Cambridge 1992; Tinyiko S. Maluleke, *Truth, national unity and reconciliation in South Africa. Aspects of the emerging theological agenda*, in: *Missionalia* 25 (1997), 59-86; John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity and democracy. A theology for a just world order*, Cambridge 1995; James R. Cochrane (ed.), *Facing the truth. South African faith communities and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Cape Town 1999; Denise Ackermann, *Becoming fully human. An ethic of relationship in difference and otherness*, in: *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* No. 102 (1998), 13-27.



⁴³ For some references, see: Gwinyai Henry Muzorewa, African liberation theology, in: *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, 3 (1989), H. 2, 52-70; Jean-Marc Ela, Toward an African liberation theology, in: *Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection: Bulletin*, (1992) 12-14, H. 14, 10-12; Emmanuel Martey, African theology and Latin American liberation theology. Initial differences within the context of EATWOT, in: *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, 5 (1995), H. 1/2, 45-63.

⁴⁴ See: Marina Tu'inukuafe, World Council of Churches and the Pacific region, in: *South-Pacific Journal of Mission Studies*, 2 (1991), H. 1, 21-23.

⁴⁵ The use of a terminology as "First" and "Third World" becomes more and more questionable, not only because of the disappearance of the so called "Second World", but even more because of the processes of globalization that have created huge "Third World enclaves" within the "First World" and "First World enclaves" within the "Third World". So what about "Maori-theology" in New Zealand/Aotearoa or "Aborigines-theology" in Australia? – Referring to the American context, the US Minorities (Hispanics, Blacks, Red Indians, Asians) have been included in EATWOT a long time ago as one of its sub-groups, but not so the Pacific: there is no regional Oceania-group of EATWOT.

⁴⁶ One of the latest example is the inclusion of „Contextual Theology in Aotearoa NZ and Australia” in a three volume standard work on „Asian Christian Theologians”: John C. England et. al. (eds.), *Asian Christian Theologies. A Research Guide to Authors, Movements, Sources*, 3 vols., New York 2002ff., vol 1: „Asia Region, South Asia, Austral Asia” (2002). Under the heading „Austral Asia”, we find the Neil Darragh’s contribution, *Contextual Theology in Aotearoa New Zealand* (vol 1: 541-598) and Clive Pearson’s contribution „Australian Contextual Theologies” (vol 1: 599-657).

⁴⁷ See: Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, An Agenda for the Theological Task of the Church in Oceania, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology* 13 (1995), 5-12.

⁴⁸ Sione ‘Amanaki Havea, Christianity in the Pacific Context, in: *South Pacific Theology. Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology*, Parramatta 1987. All the papers were published in 1987 under the title “South Pacific Theology” (Regnum Books, Oxford). In his paper, Havea proposed a shift from the Pacific Christ as a picture to a Pacific Theology as a theme. As he pointed out, the Gospel has to be put from its “western theological pot” into local soil. For “coconut theology”, see: Randoll Prior, I am the coconut of life. An evaluation of coconut theology, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 10 (1993), 31-40. See also: Sione ‘Amanaki

Havea, The quest for a 'Pacific' church, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology*, 2/6 (1991), 9-10.

⁴⁹ Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, He began in Galilee and now he is here. Thoughts for a Pacific Ocean theology, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology* 4 (1990), 4-9. Idem, An Agenda for the Theological Task of the Church in Oceania, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology* 13 (1995), 5-12.

⁵⁰ See: Inaugural Pacific Conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (Suva 1994), in: *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 13 (1995), 1-48.

⁵¹ Second Consultation on Quest for Pacific Theology – Pacific EATWOT 2, in: *The Pacific Journal of Theology* 17 (1997), 2-91.

⁵² The *Pacific Journal of Theology* came out with the first issue in 1989; *Catalyst* already in 1971; the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* in 1985; *Nelen Yubu* in 1978; *Pacifica* in 1988; the *South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies* in 1989; and *Vashti's Voices* in 1997.

⁵³ Among the main figures of the (yet short) history of Pacific Contextual Theology, apart from Havea and Tuwere, the following scholars have to be mentioned: Keiti Ann Kanongata'a (A Pacific women's theology of birthing and liberation, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology* 7 (1992), 3-11; idem, Domestic theology, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology* 15 (1996), 73-75); Jovili Meo (Smallness and solidarity, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology* 6 (1991), 91-96; idem, Pioneering new perspectives in Pacific theology. Consultation opening address, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology* 15 (1996), 13-15); Kiliona Mafau Fau (Pacific time and the times.: A theological reflection, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology* 6 (1991), 22-30); Paulo Koria (Moving toward a Pacific theology. Theologising with concepts, in: *Pacific Journal of Theology* 22 (1999) 3-14); Mikaele Paunga (Contours of Contextual Theologies from Oceania, in: *chakana* 2 (2003), 47-67).

⁵⁴ The issue No. 27 (2002) has been dedicated mainly to this Conference and its main papers: Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, What is Contextual Theology? – A View from Oceania, 7-20; Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, Why Contextual?, 21-40; and Jovili Meo, How do we Do Contextual Theology?, 41-60.

⁵⁵ The contributions of this conference have been published in the *Pacific Journal of Theology* 29/2003: Sandy Yule, What is Contextual Theology?, 11-25; Tevita Tonga Mohenoa Puloka, Sisu Tonga, 26-29; Ma'afu 'o Tu'itonga Palu, Pacific Theology. A Re-consideration of Its Methodology, 30-59.

⁵⁶ The journal *Vashti's Voices*. A journal exploring theologies for a just future builds on the style of *Vashti's Voice* [the extra "s" makes a



difference], a feminist theology journal published between 1978 and 1991. In 1995, “Weavers” hold the first Consultation on “Women’s Theology – Pacific Perspectives” in Suva. See also: Marie Ropeti, *Feminist theology. A view from the Pacific*, in: Ofelia Ortega-Montoya (ed.), *Women’s visions. Theological reflection, celebration, action*, WCC Geneva 1995, 172-176; Lydia Johnson and Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono (eds.), *Weavings: women doing theology in Oceania*, Suva 2003.

Weavers Book Launch

Suliana Siwatibau

Suliana Siwatibau has held various leadership and consultancy roles for the Fiji Government and Non-Government Organisations in Fiji, the Pacific Region and most UN-based programmes.

Her areas of expertise are:

- *project design, planning and evaluation;*
- *project management and consulting;*
- *community development and informal education;*
- *renewable energy, environment and resource management;*
- *traditional herbal medicine*

She has variedly published and contributed to books, written journal articles and presented conference papers.

I wish to thank Weavers sincerely for the privilege of inviting me to launch this watershed publication. As a lay person at the periphery of official church affairs, I am pleasantly surprised at the celebration of women's talents and the recognition of their rights as equals in our patriarchal church institutions that this publication demonstrates. Through this work, the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools shows that it has indeed come of age. I am both impressed and inspired by the 23 very insightful essays that thread the weave of this creation. Not only are the main weavers all women but also those who so skillfully put it together – the editors, the proofreaders, the cover design and cover drawing, the typesetting and indexing, the printing and production, were all women. This is not to degrade the skills of men who could have been involved but only to support the assertion implied in this team work that women also have talents equal to men. That, after all, is the major theme of the book – that the equality of men and women is divine. Both are made in the image of God/Goddess. The women writers ably support their arguments with quotations both from biblical teachings and from the work of philosophers and social analysts within and outside the Pacific region. Thinking Christians everywhere will find it



difficult to argue against the thrust of their conclusions. These are grounded on firm personal experiences that are themselves a complex interweaving of the cultural context of each writer's upbringing, the biblical basis of her faith, the constraints and values of her society, and each woman's own personal journey.

Seven of the 23 contributors reflected on theological parallels and lessons that may be learnt from the cultural values and practices of their own contexts. Celine Hoiore likens the deep relationship the Maohi have with the land of their birth to a special relationship with God the *metua* - the parent, or *metua vahine* - the mother. Throughout the Pacific we acknowledge vital links with mother earth who Celine equates with God, of whom we are all part. Tamara Wete of Kanaky uses the motherhood metaphor in the context of its centrality to cohesion and survival of the Kanak society. Wete claims that while the western feminist sees motherhood as a male constructed institution that oppresses women, she asserts that Kanaky women see motherhood as a distinctly female and powerful experience that therefore presents the notion of motherhood of God/Goddess as being very special to women. Both Michiko Ete-Lima of Samoa and Maleta Kutimeni Tenten of Kiribati describe special treatments of women that display the way they are valued in their different cultures. Ete-Lima reflects on the treasured relationship between brother and sister that gives many privileges to the latter even into adulthood, marriage and later life. In her theology of this special sibling relationship she sees God as both brother and sister, for each displays the qualities of God within the *feagaiga* relationship. Tenten, on the other hand, chose to illustrate the special position of women in Kiribati culture through the ceremonies associated with a girl's first menstruation or *katekateka*. She explains that unlike most patriarchal societies, the I Kiribati sanctify *katekateka* and thereby lay the foundation for the acceptance of the ordination of women into the ministry. This is particularly so in the Kiribati Protestant Church whose members still practise *katekateka*.

Judith Vusi of Vanuatu and Valamotu Palu of Tonga use imagaries of women's daily work to reflect and reveal the presence of God in our everyday lives. Palu relates the loving care and dedication that the Tongan woman tapa maker shows to her task and likens this

not only to God's loving care for each of us but also to illustrate his presence within us. Vusi recalls a legend from her community in Vanuatu that reminds her of the rejection of Christ. The women of Vanuatu, whose many contributions to society get little recognition, identify with the rejected Christ whom Vusi calls the Lord of the insignificant. Mine Pase of Samoa writes a fittingly positive and hopeful ending to this section with her discussion of the interaction of culture and gospel in Samoa. She recognises the disconnection between gospel and culture over the situation of women in society and the church. She, however, also notes the growth of "beloved communities" where both men and women can become who they really are as Christians and accept each other as equals.

Part two of the book comprises four biblical reflections on issues of ownership of land and of the right of women to participate in theological discussions. Rosalyn Nokise reflects on how the biblical story of creation asserts the intimate connection between earth, God's breath of life and human existence. She compares the different concepts of the land and humanity's relationship with the land that exist between Pakeha and Maori and ends with a challenge to Pakeha Christians to look critically at the issues of power and control that are associated with the ownership of land in Aotearoa. Lesila Raitiqa from Fiji also chose the issue of land ownership as her subject but through reflecting on the story of Ruth from the Old Testament's Book of Ruth. Raitiqa claims that through her choice to return with her mother in law to the family land, Ruth redeemed the land and thereby revealed God as Redeemer. The other two contributors to this part of the book reflect on the right of women to think theology. Joan Filemoni-Tofaeono took the story of Martha and Mary and leads the reader in a very interesting exploration of the situation of women, and the attitude of Jesus that the story portrays. A lesson for Pacific women in this very effective bible study exercise is that it is OK to do theological reflections and other such male activities instead of being always in the kitchen or doing housework. Filemoni-Tofaeono ends with a letter to Jesus from Marthya – a combination of Martha and Mary in recognition of the fact that every woman has a Mary and a Martha in her and is often in dilemma as to which role to play. Marie Ropeti closes this

second part of the book with a strong essay on the biblical basis for the ordination of women. She quotes extensively from both the Old and the New Testaments. She relates the positive trends today of women increasingly claiming leadership roles in the church so that not only are they able to do theology but also free to serve the church as fully ordained ministers within it.

In her essay in Part One, Mine Pase states that the gospel needs a culture as a forum for its presentation. By the same token, a church needs a society for the expression of its mission which is therefore determined by the particular needs of that society.

Part Three of the book comprises eight separate reflections on Church and Society. It begins with Sister Emi Oh's interpretation of her dream about Cardinal Tom cutting her hair. This she took as a basis for her analysis of hierarchy and exclusivity within the church and society and her hope for the transition to genuine equality with no place for hierarchy and gender discrimination in our society. Ilisapeci Meo begins her essay with the story of a church elder who joyfully discovered for the first time that women were created in God's image - just like men. This story exposes the deeply held views of a patriarchal society and church that both need to be liberated of their shackles of biased interpretation of the gospel resulting in unjust divisiveness. Part of that liberation has to be brought about by the women themselves is the assertion of Meresiana Soronakadavu in her essay. She analyses the traditional, restrictive and subservient role of women in Fiji and calls on them to use their gifts and talents to become full and equal participants with men in the life of their communities and the church. One such inspiring example is presented in the next essay by Asinate Samate of Tonga. In a church and society that are strongly patriarchal, Samate was determined to develop her considerable talents to the full and became both a school principal and church minister. That such positive changes are also occurring elsewhere in our region is evident in the essay on partnership in church and culture by Rose Mansale of Vanuatu. Despite the dominant role of men in that society, a transformation is taking place whereby the important contribution of women is increasingly recognised. Fetaomi Tapu-Qilio writes as a young Samoan immigrant in New Zealand. She relates the loss that uprooted youth

feel and how they find comfort outside the mainline churches. Marama Sovaki of Fiji contributes a poem on the political turmoil that devastated her multicultural, multiethnic, multireligious society. She calls on women to unite and to weave the broken threads and rebuild Fiji. Koila Costello-Olsson ends Part Three with a prayer for the women of Fiji. It is a prayer of humility, of understanding and of resolve to act with love.

The book ends with the personal reflections of four women – Chantelle Khan of Fiji, Siera Tion Bird of Solomon Islands, Hariesa Faitala of Niue and Sainimere Niukula of Fiji. Khan poses a timely challenge to all women and Christians to break out of our deeply held construct of God as male for this is indeed a strong basis of our patriarchal society and male dominated vision of humanity. Siera Bird writes about her growth as a person in the service of the less privileged of her own society. She calls for the empowerment of women within and outside the church and the need to address social injustice particularly as it affects women. Hareisa Faitala from Niue had to battle deeply ingrained social attitudes against ordained women at all levels until an enlightened community invited her as their minister. Her journey demonstrates the need for supportive community, family and friends for women to successfully break out of their mould in the process of liberation. Sainimere Niukula's essay is a befitting closing contribution for the whole book. She traces her faith journey from her youth when she was more concerned with church rules and outward appearances, to her current mature experience and understanding of her journey as needing to be with others. These can be with people of other faiths and with the rest of creation.

This book is indeed a gift to the region and to the world. These women are insiders in one of the most patriarchal institutions on earth – the Christian Church. They are amongst a growing band of brave women and men who are challenging the interpretation of biblical teachings not only on the role of women in the churches' mission but on the situation of humanity in general in the whole of creation. They have dared to challenge some deeply held beliefs within the church. The most fundamental of these is the male dominator/female dominated model that is the basis of human relations both within and outside of the church. This book is not only for those inside the church and its many

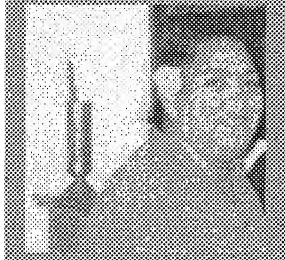
institutions such as the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools; it is also for those outside of the church who are concerned about the conditions of our Pacific societies.

Many of us who work closely with Pacific grassroots communities know only too well the great influence that churches have on our people's perception of the world and the way they organise their daily lives. We know how, for many of them, church obligations are a priority that supercedes even the meeting of basic needs. We also know that even when men make the major decisions, the successful implementation of those decisions often depends so much on the devoted input of women who make up the majority of the church membership.

This book is a call to the churches to sincerely examine the way they interpret the gospel and to lead the world in a re-interpretation that is genuinely inclusive and genuinely Christlike – as the writers themselves have so convincingly argued. Several of them also point out that the churchwomen themselves have an important role to play in initiating new theological reflections within their institutions. Women need to work hard and tirelessly to do this. To get informed, open to new ideas, to assert themselves and to claim their rights as equal participants at all levels of the church hierarchy. Hopefully, greater women participation will break down that hierarchy and exclusivity in the process.

In our globalized and rapidly changing world where competition is severe in every field, including in the transmittal of the faith, we must develop and use all of the talents and skills that our societies possess. We absolutely cannot afford to curb or ignore half of our pool of talents resident in women. The messages and the challenges presented by the reflections woven together into this beautiful book should be seriously considered by all who do care.

I am very honoured indeed to have been invited to launch this book of Pacific islander women doing theology their way and intricately weaving their reflections into such a bold and interesting statement of their own experiences, analysis and hopes for the future. I do recommend it highly.



**Joan A. Filemoni-
Tofaeono**

*Co-ordinator for the Weavers
Programme of the South Pacific
Association of Theological
Schools (SPATS)*

My Social Location

We were born, the daughters of our parents
We are called the sisters of our siblings
We are identified the wives of our husbands
We are known the mothers of our children
We are frowned upon for our barren wombs
We are made fun of for being single
We are told, remember you are a woman
We know that you created us in your image
For that we are so thankful God for our being
created.

Song

Weave us together God/dess
Weave us together
with strands that cannot be broken
Weave together God/dess (2)
Weave us forever with love

1. Sisters and brothers proclaim
You are a precious child
Created as woman and man
Together in the image of God
2. Arise, arise to your calling
To work as partners in Christ
To weave together with love
Designs of the kin/gdom of God

(Words rearrangement – Joan)



Domestic Violence - a View from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre

"If it were between countries, we'd call it a war. If it were a disease, we would call it an epidemic. If it were an oil spill, we'd call it a disaster but it is happening to women and it is just an everyday affair."

It is sexual harassment at work and sexual abuse of the young. It is the beating or the blow that millions of women suffer each and every day. It is rape at home or on a date. It is murder."
Michael Kaufman, co-founder of the Canadian White Ribbon Campaign.

Violence against women which includes domestic violence, sexual assault and the raping of women and children has, for a long time, been considered a private issue. It was only through the persistence of the women in the women's movement that the issue has been brought to the fore. A decade or even five years ago, the issue of violence against women was rarely discussed at regional or even at national level. I remember when I first joined the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and during regional and national preparations for the Beijing Conference, we had to fight to get the issue of violence against women on the agenda as an issue of concern for the Pacific, or even for Fiji, and that was amongst women's groups and funding

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agencies.

Why was there a deathly silence on the issue of violence against women? It was, and is, because violence against women was a real demonstration of the gender inequalities that exist, and to bring about positive changes for women and work towards the elimination of violence against women, one has to challenge the basic structures that exist in our society, in particular that which is reinforced by religious and cultural beliefs. Violence against women stems from the patriarchal structures which grant power to men to dominate women and keep them in place should they "step out of line". Further to this, one has to look at the systems in place to protect women who are victims/survivors.

Before going into that, I would like to explore the situation of violence against women in Fiji and the Pacific. Domestic violence is one of the most prevalent forms of violence against women. Women are more likely to get assaulted in their own homes by someone from an intimate relationship than they would from a stranger. The national research conducted by Fiji Women's Crisis Centre found that 66% of women in Fiji had been beaten by their partners. A similar research conducted in PNG in 1995 found that 67% of women in urban areas and 54% in rural areas had been beaten by their husbands. At the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre our counsellors tend to an average of 350-400 cases of domestic violence a year, and a further 500 cases would be dealt with at our branches at Ba, Lautoka and Labasa. These are first visits alone and do not include repeat visits of the clients. The two centres in Vanuatu deal with similar numbers of clients. Domestic violence, which includes physical assault, emotional torture and social isolation, is an impediment to women's personal and professional development, limiting their opportunities and participation in the community.

Sexual violence against women and the girl-child is an issue which has been rarely discussed and mainly because the largest percentage of perpetrators are relatives or men who are known to the victim. Reported cases of violence are now on the increase and this is largely due to the awareness created and the environment which allows women and girls confidence to report such acts against them. There are several

trends which are evident in Fiji and in other countries of the Pacific. These include:

- The increased brutality of the acts. The increase in physical violence associated with the sexual violence.
- The increase in gang-rapes.
- The increase in young offenders.

The prevailing attitude that women deserve to be raped makes it difficult for victims/ survivors when they attempt to pursue any legal recourse. These attitudes exist in all services which women access including counselling services provided by the religious groups. There is often pressure placed on a victim not to report or pursue a case. The family is isolated from the rest of the community if they do report, and sometimes whole congregations attend court cases to lend their support for the perpetrator.

Violence against women is a violation of women's human rights and is an obstacle to women's participation in social and economic development. It diverts women from pursuing their goals and denies countries of the full potential of its female citizens. According to a publication prepared by UNIFEM, "Family control and violence encourage some of the best educated women to leave their countries, contributing to the brain drain and the loss of highly skilled women who could contribute to the development process" (Bunch, C. and Carillo, R. 19991). This is similar to what we experience at FWCC, for example, FAB scholarships which women are utilising.

Examining the economic costs of violence against women is an important step in raising the issue at national level. We developed a module on violence against women as a development and human rights issue in the mid-nineties and use it for regional and local training. For the 16 Days of Activism campaign last year, we invited the Governor of the Reserve Bank to conduct research into the economic costs of violence against women. Based on the New Zealand model of research which we provided for him, he calculated that violence against women in Fiji would cost approximately \$300 million per annum. Without losing sight of the many faces of the women who fall victims of gendered violence, this is an indication of the gravity of the situation in

terms of the national economy.

Services for victims/survivors of gender-based violence leave a lot to be desired. Apart from providing the counselling service to women, the counsellors at FWCC have the on-going battle of advocating on behalf of clients at every service and agency to ensure that they are treated in a just manner and their dignity maintained. Lobbying for changes in policy and an improvement in service is a crucial aspect of our work and the training which we provide to these various service agencies is an important step to service delivery.

And what of the church and other religious institutions? Often the first point of contact for women who are living in domestic violence situations is the church, and for many the response is the same - to forgive and forget and that it is part of married life. Repentance and forgiveness is about a change in behaviour and often that behavioural change is expected from the woman - to become a better wife and a better mother - there is no pressure on the man to change his violent behaviour.

Violence against women cuts across all backgrounds - age, race, religion, culture or economic status, therefore it is imperative that it is addressed at every level. Given that churches play such a crucial role in the lives of Pacific people, it is important that theological institutions prepare the priests, pastors and other religious with skills to deal effectively with members of the congregation should the need arise. The skills imparted should include basic awareness of the issue, understanding the dynamics of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse. There should be some training in the area of gender issues as well as human rights and some basic counselling skills to enable them to deal appropriately with various issues. The churches need to be proactive in how they address these issues - with youth groups, through pre-marital counselling and other such structures which it may have in place. Structures need to be put in place to deal effectively with members of the clergy or even lay church workers who perpetrate crimes of violence against women. These recommendations are not new to the churches - they are a part of the recommendations in the Apia Declaration of 1996 which is a declaration of the PCC.

Dealing with violence against women is a challenge. It includes

dealing with the pain of the women and girls who are victims, assisting them to overcome unjust systems, lobbying for policy and legislation changes in a forum that is not always accommodating and friendly and, most importantly, working to change attitudes that are sometimes blatant and other times camouflaged by political correctness. These are attitudes which view women as second-class and not accord them their status at a very basic level as human beings. Violence against women is a human rights violation which needs to be addressed with urgency.

Domestic Violence and the Law

Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi

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Ratu Joni served in the Attorney-General's Chambers from 1983-1991. He was then appointed Permanent Arbitrator before his elevation to the High Court bench in 1997. Ratu Joni resigned in October 2000 to enter private practice. He is interested in reading, writing letters, films and doing nothing.

Violence against women and children is a topical issue for several reasons. First, because it is a violation of the most vulnerable members of our society. Second, it is in direct contravention of human rights instruments such as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Third, it is contrary to the teachings of all the great religions which exalt women as nurturers and afford children a special place because of their state of dependence. Fourth, because, sadly, it is all too widely spread throughout our region.

Violence is used as a means to dominate, subjugate and maintain control over women and children. What part has the law played in this equation? Sadly, a significant one, the effect of which has reinforced the disadvantaged states of those groups. Through the courts, law enforcement agencies and beyond, the attitudes of male-dominated power structures have persisted to the present. This has been a great cost to all of us by way of traumatized families, broken homes and juvenile delinquency, resulting in criminal behaviour. The power of the law, and hence its influence, lies in the sanctions it prescribes for criminal conduct and the relief it can provide to women and children by awarding maintenance and other monetary compensation. In practice, the capacity

to relieve the plight of disadvantaged women and children is compromised by conditioned responses.

The problem begins with the artificial separation of what is a domestic dispute and that which attracts the intervention of legal sanctions. Violence against women at home, in particular, often acquires some exclusionary characteristic that makes the authorities reluctant to intervene. The sanctity of the home is used as an excuse to justify this state of affairs. What that amounts to is allowing men free rein to assault women in the home. Is such behaviour less criminal because it takes place at home? Of course not. Violence is violence irrespective of where it occurs. Attitudes are changing. The “no drop” policy of the former Commissioner of Police is to be commended. However, it needs to be consistently enforced. The rationale for such attitudes lies in the male being head of the household and therefore able to do as he pleases. Just as the police have powers to enter a house without a warrant where they believe an offence is being committed or about to be committed, so they are at liberty to intervene where a woman is being beaten by a man in the home. The reverse also applies.

Beyond the home, women face the courts with their ingrained attitudes. Domestic disputes usually attract more lenient sentences compared with other crimes of violence and property offences. What appears to have an important bearing is the connection between the men and women. This often colours the views of the courts. What this is saying is that the relationship allows to some extent to perpetrate some form of violence on his partner. In the same context, a man assaulting a woman or with whom he had had no dealing would possibly invite a harsher penalty. Such an approach is an echo of the times when women were regarded as property, therefore, men could treat them as they pleased. The Fiji Human’s Rights Movement and the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre, as well as other groups, have worked hard to change such perceptions. It takes time but they have had some success.

It is in sexual assault cases that the law has been most intractable in its effect. It requires corroboration in rape cases, not as a rule of law but as a practice. It is not required if the victim is believed. In effect, it is a rule of law because courts almost invariably require corroboration, which is independent confirmation in some material particular of the

victim's assertion of rape. This is never required of men but is also demanded of children. The fear is that women might have concocted such a story. Only women are felt likely to make up facts. In some jurisdictions laws have been enacted to make previous sexual conduct irrelevant. Because it is. What is being considered is the particular conduct with which the alleged offender is charged. Previous sexual behaviour has no relevance or place in that regard. In reality, it is remorselessly dredged up as a means of discrediting and humiliating the victims, suggesting that their lifestyle justified the conduct complained of. Put simply, women are persons in their own right with the freedom to do as they choose with whom they please. God gave all of us free will in the Garden of Eden to glorify him according to his percepts or to reject him as we chose. He did not give men license to commit violence against women however much they might wish to invoke the Old Testament and some of the preachings of St. Paul to justify their conduct.

Change is never easy because it requires giving up cherished beliefs and long established habits. However, it can be done but it will take time. It requires patience, tolerance and willingness to engage those with a different view. They must be persuaded that there is a better way and that violence against women and children is harmful, hurtful and counterproductive. Those that both administer and enforce the law, as well as those who practice it, need to appreciate the effects of it on the wider society. How is this being achieved? By a combination of method, through gender training, sensitization and interaction with those who see at first hand and work closely with women and children who suffer daily the effects of violence against them. We all reflect the sum total of our experiences and are conditioned by the environment in which we live. But we are also members of families, wives, fathers, sons, daughters and husbands, and in that way have some appreciation of what it might mean to live in such circumstances. What is that the Lord requires of us but to do justice, love, mercy and to walk humbly with him. That is what I leave with you tonight as we work together to overcome these tragic social problems of our societies.

Violence against Women and Children - A Theological Challenge

Bible according to St. Matthew's account, "The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.'" (Matt. 2:13)

Let us spend a little time looking closely at the characters in this text. We have the angel, Joseph, Mary, the infant Jesus, and Herod. We have here a family being threatened with violence. Herod is a political leader who demonstrates how male power and state power can be misused and abused through the use of violent means against human beings. Fortunately, on the other hand, there is the man Joseph who portrays to us the character of a male figure who is at peace within himself, who conducts himself with grace, dignity and with a great sense of responsibility towards the woman and her infant child. The threat of violence was real that the angel had to forewarn Joseph to take the child and his mother into safety. Yes, as victims of violence, they needed safety. They escaped into Egypt. The woman and her child were forced to unjustly go through the painful experience of displacement, insecurity, and uncertainty. We can see what violence does to human beings. There is no good news in

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violence. Violence is always bad news, and even worse when it is against women and children. It is unacceptable behaviour.

When we talk about violence in general we talk about the various forms of violence such as biological violence, physical violence, psychological violence, structural or institutionalized violence. A clinical psychologist, Dr. Robert Grant, says that violence has many names and comes in many forms. Whether it is through war, child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, torture, racism, or terrorism, human beings sustain serious and often life-long damage. Looking at the various kinds and forms of violence, how can we live with good conscience when women and children are subjected to any one or more of these forms. This is not just a theological challenge but a direct challenge to the Herods of our communities and societies to stop. On the positive side we encourage and form more Josephs. We appeal to the churches and theological institutions to inform others of the danger of violence as the angel did. When the angel conveyed the message to Joseph to take the woman and her child to safety, the angel was at the same time telling us that God does not condone violence in any form.

Violence against women and children is an offence against God and against the victim. It is a grave sin, a grave injustice. We also have to bear in mind that we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we *cooperate in them*, by participating directly and voluntarily in them; by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them; by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so; and by protecting evil-doers. Those who advised, praised, approved and protected Herod cooperated in his sinful act.

As we deal with violence against women and children we also have to deal with the dignity of the human person created in the image of God. This is the transcendental and spiritual dimension of the human person. Jesus gave us a religious ministry, and the nature of the ministry is religious in character. This religious ministry has as its primary objective the achievement of the Kingdom of God, and the power of the Kingdom is designed to permeate every dimension of life.

As Christian churches we have a responsibility to protect the transcendental dimension of the human person. We have a moral duty to protect the dignity of the human person and in protecting we also

promote human rights. They are part of our religious ministry. Violence against women and children is a violation of their dignity and rights. The Church exercises her ministry rightly when she unceasingly speaks out against the violation of human dignity and rights. She pays special attention to the vulnerable members of society, especially women and children. In being faithful to her religious ministry, the Church also has to announce ways that will promote the living of virtuous life and goodness, more especially the transforming character of the Kingdom of God. .

As I speak of Church, I also speak of theological institutions which prepare men and women for leadership roles in their various churches. They are influential people who can enlighten their members to be herald of good news, people who can make a lot of difference in the attempt to eliminate violence against women and children. I readily agree with the advice of the New Zealand bishops who, in their 1992 pastoral statement condemning violence against women and children, reminded us Christians that we are called in a special way to help create an environment in which healthy relationships are encouraged and able to flourish. They even asked those involved in the preparation of catechetical programmes, in adult education, and in marriage preparation programmes, to ensure that the dignity and fundamental equality of men, women and children are clearly taught, that sexual stereotyping is avoided, and the development of non-violent methods of communicating and resolving disputes is encouraged.

Those who have pastoral responsibility are often in a privileged position to help in situations of violence. The bishops asked them to take advantage of opportunities for education and training in how to deal with these matters. Those who have pastoral responsibility are asked to take note of the following:

- take seriously the woman or child who discloses abuse;
- avoid simplistic solutions and a false spiritualizing of the problem;
- avoid the misuse of Scripture in any way that would appear to justify male domination;
- be informed as to available community resources (medical, legal, shelter, counseling and

- educational) and know when and how to refer to others for specialized help;
- be ready to deal with the profound spiritual questions that arise concerning the woman's
- relationship with God and her worth and dignity as a person;
- create a parish atmosphere where people and church leaders can discuss the question of
- violence against women and children openly and sensitively, in homilies and other
- forums

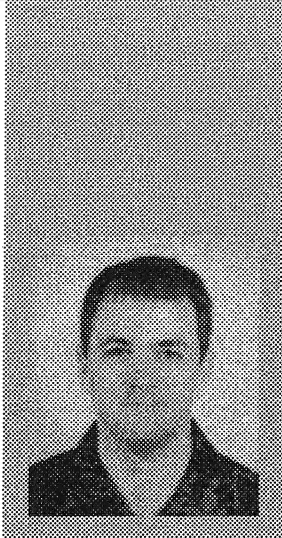
It is also important to draw attention to the roles of our traditional form of reconciliation. There is great value in this aspect of our various South Pacific cultures. But it is also important that this traditional form of reconciliation is not abused when we deal with violence against women and children, let alone to any human being. The danger is that with wrong timing and insensitivity it will do more harm to the victims.

There needs to be a space for the victims to come to term with the physical and psychological trauma being inflicted on them. The perpetrator also needs space to come to term with oneself and take full responsibility for that violent act. As the New Zealand bishops rightfully say, "Christian forgiveness is not in opposition to requiring those who perpetrate injustice to be held accountable. This can mean requiring them to seek positive help, or be confronted in a court of law." There must be a genuine desire and intention from the perpetrator to change and with a firm determination that the violent behaviour is not to be repeated. The acknowledgement of the truth, the change of heart and the readiness of the victims indicate that our traditional form of reconciliation can take place and forgiveness is possible.

In saying this it is also wise to caution our Christian churches not to make the same mistake of foreclosing the healing process by rushing into reconciliation. It reminds me of an incident whereby a religious person made a mistake of trying to bring the families of the victim and families of the perpetrator together to reconcile. The two families and the perpetrator readily agreed. Unfortunately, the victim refused because safety was not yet established and the movement towards

reconciliation was more threatening than healing. I was approached for help and I told this religious person that the victim, a young lady, saw all of them as taking side with the perpetrator. She was feeling more insecure even with church members. It became clear that reconciliation had to be dropped until the victim was ready. But we all know forgiveness is possible with God's grace and in the spirit of truth and love. We know that home is a place for love and the family environment is the foundation for love. Let us not allow this noble institution to be the foundation for violence, for violence only breeds more violence.

Since promoting human dignity and the defence of human rights is part of the religious ministry entrusted to us by Jesus, I encourage all theological institutes to make sure that this topic is well covered in their curriculum. At the Pacific Regional Seminary this is covered under the course Justice and Ethics. I am sure other theological institutions are doing the same but if not I join SPATS and Weavers in encouraging you to do so. We take heed of the advice not to cooperate in the grave sin of violence against women and children. The best way to publicly indicate our disapproval of this unacceptable behaviour is to follow the example shown by our churches, WCC, PCC, SPATS, Weavers and other institutions that have explicitly denounced violence.



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Cheek Turning is Not Submission: Jesus' Ethic of Non-Violent Resistance

(Scripture Text: Luke 6:26-36)

The invitation to preach here at this Roman Catholic sister college gave me great pleasure.¹ Having been trained at a place called St. Francis Xavier University – you can guess which order founded that place – and later in French Canada, I have had many happy relations with Roman Catholics. An important mentor and professor of mine was Gregory Baum, the Augustinian moral theologian and sociologist. One time, visiting the Convent of the Sisters of St. Martha in Nova Scotia I let slip my admiration for the Jesuits and said that, if I had been Catholic, I would have liked to join them. I later discovered that for years a group of these nuns had continued to pray for my conversion to the Church of Rome so that I could become a Jesuit. I should have invited them to my wedding so that they could surrender their labours.

I have to offer a little apology in advance here. This sermon will be fairly serious for such a friendly and fraternal gathering. I'm sorry about that, but because the Luke passage came up in the lectionary this week, and because I'm looking out at a collection of women and men who will eventually disperse to have great impact upon communities all across Oceania, I cannot resist the temptation to confront a great misuse of Jesus' words.

Before we get to this, however, let me tell a story to get us considering the issue tackled by the sermon: violence and how to respond to it.

For the first half of 2000 my wife, Fiona, and I traveled around South Africa researching that country's reconciliation process. During our travels, we interviewed many people who had been devastated by the violence of the apartheid era in which blacks were so greatly oppressed and the white government's policies of racial exclusion pushed the country into near civil war. We heard many horrible stories. One of the most startling was about a black man who reached the breaking point. This man's name was Oliver. His next-door neighbour was an eighty-seven year old lady who had a son serving as a soldier with one of the anti-apartheid liberation armies. One day the security police came to search her house. Finding that the son was not there, they punished his elderly mother instead, beating her to death. The next morning, full of hot blood, Oliver went to a busy road where people of all races would be traveling to work. He gathered a crowd of blacks together and worked them to a fury with his story of what the white policemen had done. He decided to kill the first whites they encountered. Two white laborers came down the road on foot. They were stoned and set on fire. Oliver then turned himself in to the police. He did not want to hide from his actions. He was proud of them.

Any of us who have been seriously hurt by other people understand the taste for vengeance. The desire for payback can be powerful indeed, but, as social beings and as Christians, we know that it must be resisted. It does too much harm. And if we cannot see this for ourselves, the words of Jesus, found in both Luke 6 and Matthew 5 make it clear. I read from the former: "But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes your coat do not withhold even your shirt."

This has been called an ethic of non-resistance. It appears to be the response that Jesus would have us act out when others attack us. It is human nature to hate those who hate us, but Jesus would implant in us another nature: one that moves us to *do good* to haters. It is human nature to curse those who curse us, but Jesus would inspire in us another

in court being sued for the only thing they had left: their one piece of clothing – their cloak or outer garment.

Jesus' advice to these people was this: "if you are sued for your cloak, then hand it over to the one who is suing you, but do not stop there. Take off your undergarment as well, and hand that over too." Yes, Jesus was telling them to take off their *underwear* and to walk out of court stark naked. By doing this, the person being sued would be saying: "look what you have done to me! You have reduced me to nakedness. That is how hard of heart you are." This would have been very shameful to the one who dragged the poor person into debtor's court (as well as for the court itself). It would have been a masterful protest against the economic oppression of that situation and society.

In Luke 6 and Matthew 5, then, Jesus is not teaching passivity; he is teaching tactics of *non-violent resistance* for people who are so oppressed that they are almost completely powerless. He is teaching a way to register strong protest, to unmask the inhumanity of the oppressor without being reduced to imitating his violence. Of course the most powerful of these tactics was employed by Jesus himself when he surrendered to the cross.

In South Africa, violence, racial hatred, oppression, and injustice of the most naked kind was a daily reality. Many people reacted the way Oliver did: they returned killing with killing, they fought fire with fire. It did not work. Others, often spurred by preachers calling out "turn the other cheek" or "the meek shall inherit the earth," took the opposite path and did nothing, suffering in silence. That did not work either. Then there were those like Archbishop Desmond Tutu who took a middle path. They loved their enemies, not by yielding to them but by standing strong and calling out the humanity that was buried in them. They marched to the places of bloodshed and stood in the path of bullets. They rallied and danced in the tens of thousands at the funerals of the fallen. The TV cameras followed; the world woke up. They went on strike, refusing to labour in an economy that made war machines to be used against them. They went into exile and wandered the world, showing their wounds and asking for help. Help came. It took half a century, but the world community rose up and cried "no" and apartheid crumbled. A resurrection. A great resurrection, after so

many crucifixions.

For a contextual sermon, this one has not said much about Oceania so far, at least not directly. Well, despite my frank words, I am aware that I am still very much a guest in this part of the world. So let me contextualise by asking questions. What are the crucifixions in your communities? Who are the women being violated and crushed by men? How can you offer non-violent resistance? What are the crucifixions in your societies? Who are being pushed to the margins by the advance of unjust power? Who gets poorer as the rich get richer? How can you offer non-violent resistance?

As I said earlier, Christ calls us first to imitate him, not only to worship him. You know where the crucifixions are in your communities and your societies. To imitate Christ would be to confront these injustices, not with passivity but with non-violent resistance. This requires the embodiment of one of Jesus' strongest qualities, one that we do not talk about very often. I do not mean his faith. Neither do I mean his compassion – nor his grace. I mean his *courage*. Yes, his courage. The courage of Christ, the courage of the non-violent resister of evil must be even stronger than that of the warrior. For the non-violent resister does not strike back. He does not return blows with blows. She does not lift the sword to protect herself. The courage of Christ is the greatest courage we can embody for it is the only one that returns hate with love. Even if a great price must be paid to do so.

Notes

¹ A sermon delivered at Pacific Regional Seminary, joint service with Pacific Theological College, 19/09/2003.

² At this point in the sermon a visual demonstration was offered to explain what Jesus was driving at when he taught his followers to “turn the other cheek.” In this printed version I change and extend the text somewhat to compensate for the lack of visual demonstration. Here I am following the work of the New Testament scholar, Walter Wink. See his *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) pp. 175-9.

³ All biblical quotations from the NRSV. Italics mine.



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The Role of Women in Developing a Culture of Peace

Paper presented at the Ministry of Reconciliation and Unity workshop titled

"The Hand that Rock the Cradle holds the key to a United Fiji"

Suva, 28th October 2003

I thank the Ministry of Reconciliation and Unity for this invitation. If you ask me, as the topic suggests, what is the role of women in developing a culture of peace I would honestly say I have no idea and besides I am not in a position to even suggest what is to be your role. But what I hope to offer are some pointers, how limited these may be, for your consideration. I hope that they may spark reflections and conversations on your role as women in creating a culture of peace. I would like to acknowledge two people who influenced much of my thinking lately, particularly in relation to peace and reconciliation. A Catholic Archbishop, Petero Mataca, and a Jewish Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks.

1. Introduction

There are three interrelated life lessons that I have come to deeply appreciate. These are drawn from experiences in my upbringing and later in life, from women

(and men) who are significant to me. First, as a child growing up, I learn the narratives of my family and community relations, through women. They are depositories of narratives. Because of this, although not often recognised which is very tragic, women are better disposed to be mediators, counsellors and mentors. Second, narratives also serve another purpose: it speaks of differences. Women have a greater awareness and experience of what it means to be different. This experience may serve to be a key resource in creating a culture of peace. Third, women's ability to give grief a public expression is much needed in a society that is increasingly being told through advertisements, therapy, prosperity preaching, etc., that grief has no place in this new world we are creating. But how can we ever hope to transform or give new life if we lose or even forget how to grieve?

2. A view of Culture of Peace and Reconciliation

A culture of peace, for me, consists of values, attitudes, behaviours and ways of life based on non-violence and respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of every person. It represents a caring society which protects the rights of those who are weak or handicapped or socially disadvantaged. Its goal is a world in which this rich diversity lives together in an atmosphere marked by intercultural understanding, tolerance and solidarity.

Reconciliation is recalling the harm done, telling the truth, justice and compensation. The aim is to restore the humanity of people involved in conflict and the dignity of the community. Reconciliation has a broader political meaning (here I am not talking about party politics) but rather the relationships between individuals, groups and communities of people. Politics is about negotiating differences in a society and not removing differences. This has an important lesson to how we conduct reconciliation processes; reconciliation does not take away differences but rather deepens respect for and dignifies differences. That is why reconciliation can never be genuine if in the process differences are wiped out.

3. The Role of Narratives

Narratives play an important role in the creation of a culture of peace. It contributes to healing and restoring dignity. But this is premised on our ability to create a safe space where narratives could be told and shared. A simple example is the National Council of Women organised Peace Vigils soon after the 2000 coup. Women and men were invited to share their stories, their narratives of connecting events prior, during and after the coup, their uncertain and frightful place in it, their losses and hopes.

Safe space then becomes an important part of remembering, and remembering is a narrative of healing. It allows room for people to make the connecting threads, intelligibly. Broadly speaking, narratives remind us that life is a narrative, a story and not a series of episodes with no connecting threads. This is all the more important in our present time as more and more, lives are becoming lifestyles, commitments become experiments, relationships become provisional, and careers turn into contracts.

Aside from the capacity to respond effectively by creating *safe space*, women also have a specific narrative of their own. Women know what it means to be different. Stories throughout history attest to the fact that women are one, if not the most oppressed, exploited and abused group of people in our human history, simply because of being different. That is the narrative; the experience of being different and its consequence throughout history. Yet, women hold the key to exorcise the ghost of Plato, the Greek philosopher who lived almost 2,500 years ago. I will go into this a bit more in the language of difference. But suffice to say at this point that the experience of being different is to teach others the dignity of difference.

So what are the lessons to creating a culture of peace and reconciliation? Here are some suggestions.

- First, narratives must have a legitimate place in the process. That is, people must be allowed the space to tell their own story, however they perceive reality to be. There is no judgement

or punishment here; that is for another process. It is simply dignifying each one's narrative, however wrong these may seem to some of us. This raises the question of capacity – facilitation and documentation. Stories make us remember, and remembering helps us to make better choices for the future.

- Second, narratives can be told in a series of connecting forms - documentation, art, rituals and/or symbols. Most religions, for example, have a Holy Book, rituals, symbols and sacred songs. One very powerful symbolic action that I find inspiring was in Guatemala where atrocities were committed during years of civil war resulting in the death of thousands. In planting a special native tree and the creation of a ritual around it, allows a community of survivors to come back each year to remember and plan strategies to sustain peace. By doing this, the community continues to hold on to their sanity and dignity; that vengeance has no place in their lives. It is also a fundamental criticism of the injustices of their society and the way it thrives on greed for power and wealth, lies and death.

4. The Language of Difference

For better or worse, the ghost of Plato still haunts us. We surely inherited the language of Plato; the “language of universalism” - the world of ideas; that truth lies in the abstract, that harmony and order lie in the world of uniformity. In other words, what is good, orderly and noble is to be found in what is considered universal abstracts. Hence, it can be applied anywhere, at anytime despite differences in cultural, social and even gender conditions. The particular is seen as chaotic, disorganised and littered with violence and wars.

The tragic mistake we so often make in our human history is to separate the two and pursue the universal, mainly because it is far easier to manage, control and dispense at will either through force or other means. Great empires of history rose and fell on the Plato principle, but not before differences were violently wiped out. The results were devastating. Yet, this simple but very alluring idea underpinned the drive of great empires of the past, the enlightenment and of course in our times, global capitalism.

back on my personal experience, I cannot help but appreciate the striking balance my mother attempted to keep between the “universal” concerns of the village, and the particular concerns of her family of diverse needs. There were thirteen of us in the family, including Mum and Dad. Dad was primarily concerned with the “universals” of the family – maintaining unity and discipline - village and wider community concerns.

The lesson here, I suppose, is that we learn to love humanity by loving particular human beings, however chaotic that may be, and not an abstract idea of a human being. In other words, we become universal by being particular. This is a point made by Archbishop Petero Mataka in a newspaper article some months back. That is why in many instances, women are able to play multiple roles in conflict situations, are more disposed as mediators/negotiators between conflicting parties and effective mentors to those affected by conflict. Moreover, they are at the forefront of demonstrations against human rights abuses, wars, exploitation, and other forms of inhumanities. This is because women know what it means for another woman in another country to give birth, nourish and love a specific human being. There is nothing relative about this. It is both particular and universal. That to me is women’s “language of difference”.

How does one translate this into strategies and activities in the attempt to create a culture of Peace? I would think further conversations on one fundamental question are needed: how can women’s “language of difference” a key resource in reconciliation and the creation of a culture of peace? If reconciliation is about deepening respect for and dignifying differences, then of course it must not be a process that reduces differences to sameness. That would be very tragic if it does. The other two fundamental questions are: how can women influence its politics to be one of compassion? And how can women influence its economics to be one of sharing? One is about identities and differences, and the other is about resources.

5. The Role of Grief

A culture of peace or reconciliation without grief is a farce. There are many instances in our recent past that require us to grieve. Some of us do. But many of us simply do not have the time or the will to grieve; we are just too busy rebuilding our lives or trying to make sense of what had happen. We simply move on. But the fact that we did not have the time to grieve, except for very few opportunities, says something about the state of our society.

When we increasingly become not only deaf to other's grief but also our own, we are reaching a level of numbness and denial that jars our sense of justice. It is when we can say things or implement policies that discriminate against others who are different without a hint of awareness that what we say or do may just be morally wrong. We have certainly seen signs of this in recent times.

Yet, the public expression of grief is an essential sign that a society is vibrant, dynamic and very much alive. We also saw this in the past years – the demands for justice and truth behind the 2000 coup by civil society groups. This is the role of grief – calling attention to something very wrong and essentially challenging the growing sense of denial in our society. But grief is not an end in itself. It must be real because endings are real and it permits newness to emerge.

So what are the lessons to a culture of peace? Grief is a part of one's narrative and a part of one's experience of being different. To create a culture of peace, the process may demand of us a willingness to grieve and we must allow it space. It does not mean that we have to be downcast all the time, which is self-pitying. What it does mean is that we are willing to embrace new beginnings, how frightful that may be. Because grieving is risky, reconciliation and the attempt to create a culture of peace become risky endeavours. This is simply because real endings and new beginnings are not always acceptable.

Conclusion

Your narrative is important in the process, your language of difference and experience of being different may be what define your narrative, and your important role in giving public expression to grief are fundamental to the task. This is a framework that you may wish to develop further regarding its relevance to creating a culture of peace and reconciliation.

It is so easy to say to people that reconciliation and building a culture of peace start at home. It certainly is, but it is much more because it has social and political dimensions that must not be ignored. As mentioned in the beginning, I am not going to give practical suggestions as to what you should do. My task is only to offer some pointers and I hope I have done some justice to the job.

Lastly, we must exorcise the ghost of Plato. No doubt, there are universal absolutes that define our moral senses. But we do not learn these fundamentals by obeying abstract notions. Rather, we learn, for example, what sanctity of human life is through the particulars of our cultural and religious beliefs. This highlights the fundamental difference between your language and Plato's. Thank you.

A Prayer from the Women Writers' Workshop held in Nadi in April, 2001



The greatest Weaver of all times, places and people who weaves the whole world together from the beginning to the end we ask for your presence and wisdom to fill us as we come together to weave. Help us to peacefully and graciously weave with each other the coconut fibres that cannot be broken, the tapa design which adds to the beauty of our Pacific region, the baskets woven with pandanus leaves which contains the essentials of life, and the mat where the people of the Pacific sit, sing eat and dance together. We thank you, the Weaver of Weavers, for weaving with us and for weaving us into your divine patterns. Repeatedly broken and badly shattered, distorted and disfigured by the power of sin and evil spirits of this world. You never give up in weaving us back into your gracious divine nature
And into the fullness of your love, power and glory, now and evermore, AMEN

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Book Review

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The first-ever published compilation of Oceanic women's theological reflections, *Weavings* is both a product and representation of the process by which women of Oceania think and do theology. The writers of the twenty-two essays and two poems interweave the different strands of personal experience, cultural context, traditional social values and theological reflection together with the strands of biblical knowledge, church tradition and faith journey. Consequently, the reader will find an overlapping of these different elements within an essay or within a section of the book. While this interweaving may be a departure from the conventional ways of theological reflection, it harnesses a particular women's way of thinking about God and is an expression of faith.

The book has four sections. The first entitled "Contextual Theological Reflections", contains essays where the writers' cultural contexts and social norms undergird their reflections. Cultural traditions of respect, motherhood, initiation rites, status, craft making, and gender roles are explored through a theological lens to lend meaning to the writers' faith journey. In Part Two, "Biblical Reflections", analysis and discussion of selected biblical passages and stories provide venue for the writers to explore a fresh interpretation and understanding of the passages. The interaction between Church and Society provides the backdrop against which the essays in Part Three, "Church and Society", are woven. Situated in the writers' various Pacific contexts and

experiences, the themes of patriarchy, partnership, justice, sexism, vocation, and identity are critically examined, challenged, or affirmed. The section closes on a poem and a prayer. Part Four, "Personal Reflections", ends the book with the writers' personal stories of their respective faith journeys.

The book is highly commended for an individual or institution that has a vested interest in alternative ways of doing theological reflection and a particular women's method of affirming their relationship and faith in God.

Pacific Journal of Theology

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The Pacific Journal of Theology is published twice yearly by the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. It seeks to stimulate theological thinking and writing by Christians living in or familiar with the South Pacific, and to share these reflections with church and theological education communities, and with all who want to be challenged to reflect critically on their faith in changing times. Opinions and claims made by contributors to the Journal are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board or the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools.

The Editorial Board welcomes various kinds of writing which express an emerging Pacific theology. These may include:

- Original articles in the theological disciplines;
- Articles relating theological thinking to Pacific cultures, contemporary issues, and other academic disciplines;
- Helpful material for pastors and church workers (liturgical, pastoral, educational);
- Artistic expressions of the Christian faith (poetry, visual art, music);
- Notes and reviews of books which are relevant for Pacific Christians;
- Information about ongoing research in the theological disciplines in the Pacific.

Notes for Contributors

The Editorial Board will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard and in keeping with the overall policy of this Journal. It is recommended that articles should be approximately 4,320 words long. The Editorial Board reserves the right to accept or reject, and to edit all articles submitted for publication. Poetry, photographs, black and white drawings are also welcome. Articles should be clearly typed in double spacing on one side of the paper only. Any sources quoted or paraphrased should be listed in endnotes and a bibliography at the end of the article, including author, title, city, publisher and date of publication. Please include brief autobiographical data.

Language

The Editorial Board will accept articles in French and Pacific languages with an abstract in English language.

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